

Prevalence and Effects of Body-Shaming on Social Media among Undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.

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ABSTRACT

One of the most widespread forms of humiliation used by people globally is body-shaming. It has frequently led to suicide because of its negative impacts on the people and their mental health. This paper examined the prevalence and effects of body-shaming among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. The objectives of this study are to find out the causes, the effects and the prevalence level of body-shaming among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The study was anchored on cultivation analysis theory; while survey method was used with the adoption of a questionnaire as a data collection instrument. A sample of 300 respondents were drawn from the population of the study, which comprises undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Findings from the study showed that the majority of the respondents have been exposed to body-shaming at different times for either their facial looks or complexion and that females experience body-shaming more than the males. Lastly, that Social media has played a critical role in incessant form of body-shaming. The study recommended, that Students should be taken to workshops and awareness program where they should be guided about self-esteem, self-recognition and self-confidence. Public awareness program on the negative effect of body-shaming should also be promoted by the government and that National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) should censor contents that may likely lead to body-shaming especially on social media.

Keywords: Prevalence, Effects, Body-Shaming and Social media.

INTRODUCTION

Since the sixth century, body-shaming has been a hotly debated issue among people of all ages (Teeters, 2018, quoting Eco 2004). Dramatic changes in one's physical, mental, sexual, psychological, and social development mark the passage from childhood to adulthood. These turbulent years may have long-term effects on the person, particularly in terms of their mental health and ability to communicate with peers. Body-shaming, weight-shaming, or bullying based on appearance is the act of ridiculing or degrading someone based only on their outward appearance. According to a large body of knowledge, the detrimental significance of appearance-based harassment among undergraduates, frequently causes low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and depressive symptoms.

One of the most popular methods of humiliation used by people all around the world is body-shaming. It's a significant factor in suicide. This is due to the negative impacts of body-shaming on good communication and mental health, which have resulted in over 200 thousand deaths that have been attributed to their depressing effects (McCarron and Parkin, 2015). Therefore, body-shaming is associated with the majority of suicidal thought or action.

Collins (2003) asserts that people want to fit in with their peers by having the "correct" body or, more generally, by possessing anything that is regarded as acceptable by their peers. When ostracized by their peers and exposed to relentless daily teasing and torture, a victim gradually modifies his behavior patterns (Kennison&Albatinech, 2015).

These elements may cause the person to isolate themselves and adopt to unhealthy or extreme diet restrictions.

In the twenty-first century, where social media is freely accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds, there is a noticeable emphasis on the idealized body, skin, and type. Outcomes from numerous beauty blogs and pages could result in worsened mental health because Body-shaming is among the biggest issues affecting our society (Shreya,Avya, &Samiksha, 2020).

Body-shaming is a type of bullying that primarily targets an individual's physical features. These components may include size, weight, form, haircut, or dress preference. According to Shreya et al. (2020), it is a way of degrading oneself and speaking negatively about one's body, or condemning one's own body for its appearance.

In a study on young adults, it was discovered that those who feel self-conscious about their appearance display depression symptoms and engage in self-critical behavior (Duarte, Gouveia, & Ferreira, 2014).

Body-shaming is currently a common occurrence among young adults as persons who deviate from the diets, exercises, and fashion trends popularized by celebrities are judged or degraded for doing so. Nowadays, it's common to see people shame both men and women for their physical types. In the case of women, they are typically chastised or humiliated for their weight by either being termed 'Fat' or 'Too thin'. Instead of assessing their bodies holistically, males tend to focus on their muscularity, lean structure, hair, and chest. Many men exhibit this desire for a muscular structure. It has also been discovered that a man's self-esteem is tied to his physical characteristics, including his face, hair, and muscularity (McFarland & Petrie, 2012).

For this, males also suffer body-shaming if they lack the idealized images of men with "Perfect Bodies" and aren't muscular enough. Only males with defined muscles and abdominal muscles are now regarded as attractive and fit due to emerging trends. Additionally, it has been found that men's perceptions of their own bodies are negatively moderated by the media, which results in a negative assessment of their own bodies in comparison with the societal standards. (Barlette, Vowels & Saucier, 2008). It seems that despite the fact that both sexes experience body shame in different ways, there are still distinctions between how men and women see and view their bodies. In settings that are different from each other, women tend to have more unfavorable perceptions of their bodies than men do. Assessments, however, are similar for both genders when they are with their spouses. According to research conducted by Brennan, Lalonde, and Bain (2010), lower body self-esteem causes both men and women to negatively judge their bodies—including their weight, looks, and other aspects—during sexual activities. Although the criticisms are directed at a person's physical features, they frequently have psychological effects.

Statement of Problem

Social media has always had an impact on young adults' body image and body image perception. Young people have gone to extremes throughout history to conform to society's ideal of beauty and physical perfection. Models from publications, which are displayed on social media, have the average women's physique that are most admired. These days, it is regularly demonstrated that these women are leaner than the typical woman. Young adults can get photos of how they want to look using the Internet and social media. People can also look for diet and fitness tips there. Ladies can also use these platforms to make external comparisons with other women and celebrities. While social networks may not directly cause new problems for young people, they do magnify already existing ones. Social media has permanently increased our ability to examine our bodies in a way that encourages body dissatisfaction, ongoing body monitoring, and erratic cognitive patterns. The deterioration of a person's mental health and lack of confidence results

from making fun of their body type. The question is how prevalent is this issue on social media among undergraduate and its consequent effect on them. Available literatures have shown studies that have investigated body-shaming; Why a Negative body image? A study on Gender, social media, Mass media, (Teeter, 2018), The awareness of the impact of body-shaming among youth (Mustafa, Mahat, Shah, Ali, Mohideen, Muhzan, 2022), The effects of Social media use on body esteem in young women (Puglia, 2017), but none have investigated the prevalence and effects of body-shaming on social media among undergraduates. Hence this study seeks to bridge this gap.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine female body-shaming on social media: effects, prevalence and predictors. The specific objectives include to:

1. Investigate the factors that causes body-shaming among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.
2. Determine the effects of body-shaming on social media among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.
3. Examine the prevalence level of body-shaming on social media among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Research Question

In order to achieve the objectives, the following research questions were drafted

1. What are the factors that causes body-shaming among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University?
2. What are the effects of body-shaming among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University?
3. What is the prevalence level of body-shaming among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term “shame” refers to the act of making fun of someone or something. The definition of body-shaming is broad, and it may include, but is not limited to, fat-shaming, shaming for thinness, shaming for height, shaming of hairiness, of hair color, of body shape, of one’s muscularity, shaming of looks, and in its broadest sense, it may even include shaming of tattoos and piercings or diseases that leave a physical mark on such as person. (Chen & Todd, 2005).

Body-shaming, according to Tedd (2017), is the act of making fun of or humiliating someone due to their appearance. Shaming somebody for their size, shape, skin tone, hair color, body hair, and overall look is included in its broad range. In a study of young adults, body-shaming was shown to be present in 44.9 percent of cases overall. Geuveia, Ferreira, and Duart 2019). Body-shaming dates back to a time when young adults’ expectations were very different. Men who were taller and more muscular were chosen over lanky ones, while thin men were thought to be more appealing than bulkier ones. Since then, women’s beauty standards have often been unreachable and unrealistic (Tedd, 2017). Some forms of body-shaming, like prejudice against red (or ginger) hair, have their roots in popular belief that dates back thousands of years (Dettmar, 2016). Depending on the age group, discrimination can take many different forms. For instance, among preadolescents, tall teens are occasionally portrayed as uncomfortable and are sometimes referred to as “lanky” or other unflattering names. However, these negative sentiments usually change as people get older because adults tend to admire height. (Chen and Todd 2005).

The feeling that one does not sufficiently express masculinity or femininity can occasionally be a part of body-shaming. For instance, guys who have broad hips, large breasts, or no beard may experience

embarrassment for seeming feminine. Women have also experienced body-shaming for having broad shoulders or looking to have a man-bulge, characteristics that are generally associated with men (Dettmar, 2016). Significant amounts of body-shaming can have detrimental emotional impacts, such as lower self-esteem and other problems like eating disorders, anxiety, disturbed body image, body dysmorphic disorder, and depression. Additionally, body-shaming can cause severe sadness, particularly when a person feels their physique does not fulfill social expectations (Namaste, 1996).

The Role of Social Media in Encouraging Body-Shaming

The ability to communicate with people worldwide through social media is amazing. We are able to freely communicate our ideas, opinions, and experiences. It does, however, have a negative impact on “body image” that calls for awareness in order to combat.

In terms of body-shaming and how someone thinks about their own body, social media plays a significant part. Teenagers are continuously scrolling through applications like TikTok and Instagram where they are exposed to pictures and videos of a variety of models who exhibit characteristics of the “perfect physique.” When they see images of these models, they can’t help but compare themselves to them, which leads to young adults becoming incredibly insecure over time. Previous research on the impact of social media on eating disorders and body image has either employed an aggregate measure of social media use or has focused on the impact of a single social media site, such as Facebook. However, not all of the social media platforms that young adults are using today are being utilized for the same things, nor do they provide the same chances for the behaviors that may affect eating disorders and body image, such as body comparisons (Meier & Gray, 2014). Young women who engage in body comparisons may be more affected by visual, photo-based social media platforms like Instagram than by text-heavy social media sites like Twitter. The influence of platforms that are more suited to particular processes, such as body comparisons, may be hidden by metrics of social media usage as a whole.

Theoretical Framework

The cultivation analysis theory, which Larry Gross and Professor George Gerbner devised in 1976, served as the study’s theoretical foundation. According to the cultivation idea, regular exposure to media affects how viewers see the world and behave. The theory also posits that people are more likely to hold a reality-based perspective that is similar to social media’s as they use more social media. The theory further presented the audience as passive hence constant exposure will have effect on them. According to the cultivation theory, people will become less aware that pictures of the ideal physique in society are unrealistic the more frequently they are exposed to them. We are continuously exposed to the media and told how to present ourselves in the most socially acceptable manner.

According to Paige Thompson (2019), “For the most of my life, I have been surrounded by pictures of skinny women and informed by society that I was not beautiful through false ideals about beauty and body image. Unfortunately, this phrase is all too accurate for a lot of people. People are constantly exposed to images of unrealistic women, and the more often they see them, the more they think they should appear like them.

Social media users are frequently inundated with pictures of women who appear absolutely happy and healthy, have the ideal little waist or long, lean legs. The majority of women reject the fact that these representations of women are not true to life. Too many individuals are unaware of the extent to which the photographs they view have been digitally altered, despite the fact that Photoshop has become widely employed in social media and marketing.

In other words, the cultivation analysis theory applies to body-shaming on social media since the media

consistently praises women with hour glass figures and even goes as far as to use them in advertisements and endorsement roles. Users of social media frequently see the excitement surrounding people who are described as “figure 8s,” those with pale complexion, muscular men, etc. Consistency in what we see automatically creates a belief in our head. The image has been labeled as the perfect shape for a human in the imaginations of avid social media users.

Empirical Review

Sexana & Rajeev (2020) in their study to understand the relationship between body-shaming and body image, life orientation and emotional expression. The interplay between these aspects determines one’s personality and how we see the world around us. This study incorporated 150 participants including 75 males and 75 females. Snowball sampling was used to collect responses from the participants. Three scales were used to form a survey questionnaire that assessed respective aspects. The results revealed an insignificant relationship between the body image of males and females, and a significant relationship between body image and emotional expressivity which was found to be positive. However, there exists a significant and negative relationship between body image and optimism. Hence, this proves that people with positive body image can express their emotions well, but disproves the fact that positive body image can lead to a good level of optimism.

Puglia (2017) in his study examined the effects of social media use on body esteem in young women. Through a self-report survey of the research (it was found that body comparison tendency was negatively correlated with body esteem and positively correlated with the motivation to use social media for body comparisons. The study results suggest that social media is a new avenue for individuals to engage in maladaptive body comparison processes, creating a need for health communication and behavior change interventions that address this issue, especially among vulnerable population.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was survey. The population of this study is made up of the totality of undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka which is 30,917. (Source: Academic Planning Unit 2019/2020). The sample size for the study was 300 respondents based on the suggestion of Comrey and Lee (1992) that for a study involving thousands of people, a sample of 50 is very poor, 100 is poor, 200 is fair, 300 is good, 500 is very good while 1000 is excellent.

The multi-stage sampling technique was used. At the first stage, to ensure that every student within the faculties had equal chance of being sampled, a simple random sampling technique was adopted, using a “**Statistical Random Numbers Table**” and five (5) out of 14 faculties in the university were selected, namely; faculties of Agriculture, Social sciences, Arts, Engineering, and management Sciences. Using the same method, two departments were chosen, from each of the faculties, 30 students from each of the 10 departments were selected using convenience sampling procedure. This, on the whole, resulted to 300 respondents.

In distributing the questionnaire, the researcher used a Non- Probability Convenience Sampling, whereby questionnaires were served only on respondents who were available at the time and showed willingness to be sampled, when the researcher visited each of the chosen departments. Questionnaire contained 16 questions (open-ended and closed-ended) was used as the instrument for data collection. Data gathered were presented and analyzed using SPSS 19 data analysis software.

The Pre-test/ Validity

The pre-test and validation of the research instrument involved 25 respondents, to test the validity of the

field, to assess if the items in the instrument are best suited to address the measurable variables and to use the information generated to evaluate the preliminary research questions. The results from the pre-test show that the instrument was understood to a large extent by the respondents as virtually all the respondents could fill out the items. All the ambiguity was cleared before data collection.

Data Presentation and Analysis

On gender status, 103 of respondents representing 32% were males while 197 respondents about 66% were females. This shows that the majority of the respondents are female. In terms of age of the respondents, about 191 representing 64% of the entire 300 respondents are between the ages of 16-20 attempted the questionnaire. 93 respondents 31% were in the ages of 21-24, 16 respondents representing 5% were in the ages of 25 and above. This data indicates that majority of the respondents are in the age bracket of 16-20 years. On respondents' level of study, 42 respondents representing 14% of 300 were in 100 level, 58 respondents, 19% were in 200 level, 89 respondents representing 30% were in 300 level, 74 respondents about 25% were in 400 level and 37 respondents about 12% were in 500 level. This indicates that majority of the respondents are in 300 level of their study.

Research question 1: What are the factors that causes body-shaming among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University?

Table 1: Factors that causes body-shaming among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University

Variables	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Have you ever been Body shamed?	YES	275	92
	NO	25	8
	TOTAL	300	100
If yes, what have you been body shamed for?	Size	70	23
	Facial looks	100	33
	body hair	26	7
	complexion	95	32
	others	9	3
	Total	300	100
Through what form have you been body shamed?	Social media	219	73
	Face to face	77	26
	Others	4	1
	Total	300	100
Do you believe that bullying, people taking out their frustration, having low self-esteem are reasons why body shaming occurs?	Yes	195	65
	No	105	35
	Total	300	100

Responses to table 1 above show that majority of undergraduates have been body-shamed (92%), on what they have been body-shamed for, 33% said it's for their facial looks, 32% said it's for their complexion; on what form they were body shamed, majority said that its on social media (73%); while majority believe that

bullying, people taking out their frustration, and having low self -esteem are reasons for body-shaming (65%).

Research Question 2: What are the effects of body-shaming on undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University?

Table 2: Effects of body-shaming on undergraduates

Variables	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Did you feel the need to change your physical appearance because of the body-shaming?	Yes	292	97
	No	8	3
	Total	300	100
To what extent do you believe body shaming can affect one's self esteem?	Strongly Agree	155	51.7-
	Agree	72	24.0
	Strongly Disagree	10	3.3
	Disagree	4	1.3
	Undecided	59	19.7
	Total	300	100.0
Do you agree that body dysmorphic disorder is another major effect of body-shaming?	Strongly Agree	63	21
	Agree	217	72.3
	Strongly Disagree	Nil	Nil
	Disagree	Nil	Nil
	Undecided	20	6.7
Total	300	100	
Do you believe that eating disorders, anxiety, body image disturbance, depression and trauma can be as a result of body-shaming?	Strongly Agree	267	89
	Agree	31	10.3
	Disagree	2	0.7
	Undecided	Nil	Nil
	Total	300	100

Responses to table 2 above show that majority of the undergraduates felt the need to change their physical appearance because they were body shamed (97%). And they strongly agree that body shaming can affect one's self esteem (51.7%), they also agree that body dysmorphic is another major effect of body shaming (72.3%). They strongly agree that eating disorder, anxiety, body image disturbance, depression and trauma can be as a result of body-shaming.

Research Question 3: What is the prevalence level of body-shaming among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe University?

Table 3: Level of body-shaming prevalence among undergraduates

Variables	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
How frequent are you been Body shamed?	Often	235	78.3
	Sometimes	53	17.7
	Rarely	12	4.0
	Never	Nil	Nil
	Total	300	100
How common is body shaming among NnamdiAzikiwe University Undergraduate?	Very common	222	74
	Common	70	23.3
	Not common	8	2.7
	Rarely	Nil	Nil
	Total	300	100
Who experiences body-shaming more?	Male	104	34.7
	Female	196	65.3
	Total	300	100.0
Do you believe social media played a major rolein the incessant form of body-shaming?	Strongly Agree	186	62
	Agree	98	32.7
	Strongly Disagree	Nil	Nil
	Disagree	16	5.3
	Total	300	100.

Responses to table 3 above show that the majority of undergraduates are often body shamed (78.3%). and that body-shaming is very common among undergraduates (74%), It further showed that females experience body-shaming more than male. (65%). They also strongly agreed that social media played a major role in the incessant body-shaming (62%).

Analysis of Research Questions

The first research question sought to find out the factors that causes body-shaming among UNIZIK Undergraduate students?

Data in Table 1 indicate that majority of the respondents said that they have been body shamed; (92%), on what they have been body shamed for,33% said it's for their facial looks, 32 % said it's for their complexion; on what form they were body shamed, majority said that its on social media (73%); while majority believe that bullying, people taking out their frustration, and having low self -esteem are reasons for body-shaming (65%).

Research 2: What are the effects of body-shaming among UNIZIK Undergraduate students?

The majority of the undergraduates felt the need to change their physical appearance because they were body shamed (97%). And they strongly agree that body-shaming can affect one's self esteem (51.7%), they also agree that body dysmorphic is another major effect of body-shaming (72.3%). They strongly agree that eating disorder, anxiety, body image disturbance, depression and trauma can be as a result of body-shaming.

Research 3: What is the prevalence of body-shaming among UNIZIK Undergraduate students?

That the majority of undergraduates are often body shamed (78.3%). And that body-shaming is very common among undergraduates (74%), it further showed that females experience body-shaming more than male. (65%). and they strongly agreed that social media played a major role in the incessant body-shaming (62%).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.

Respondents have deep knowledge of what body-shaming is and that the majority of the respondents have been exposed to body-shaming. Majority of the respondents were body shamed for their facial looks and complexion; Over 73 percent have been body shamed on social media which could be caused by heavy exposure to the social media platform as stated by cultivation theory that "the more often someone is exposed to images of society's ideal body, the less they are going to realize that those images are unrealistic". This makes social media the most used form of body-shaming, though about 25 percent were said to have been body shamed face to face. Majority of the respondents believe that bullying, taking out frustration and having low esteem is the major reason why body-shaming occurs. According to the research, almost all the respondents testified that body-shaming has had a negative effect on them. A handful of them did not see the need to change their physical appearance after being body shamed. This finding supports the assertion by Duarte, Gouveia & Ferreira (2014) that individuals who experience the feeling of shame towards their own body exhibit depressive symptoms associated with self-critical behavior. It also supports the assertion by Namaste (1996) that body-shaming can lead to serious depression, especially when people feel their body cannot meet up with social criteria. A little above half of the respondents, 51.7 percent strongly agreed that body-shaming can affect one's self esteem. Despite the admittance of 72.3 percent of respondents attest that body dysmorphic disorder is another major effect of body-shaming, about 6.7 percent still claimed that body dysmorphic disorder is not a major effect of body-shaming. Over 88.5 percent of the respondents believed that eating disorders, anxiety, body image disturbance, depression and trauma can be as a result of body-shaming.

Body-shaming is now a frequent act among undergraduates as 78.3percent are often body shamed. Body-shaming is now very common among UNIZIK undergraduates as 74 percent of the respondents attested to it. The prevalence of body-shaming is more alarming to the female gender than it is to the male gender. From the findings, Social media has played critical role in incessant form of body-shaming which is in agreement to the assertion made by Shreya, Avya & Samiksha (2020) that with various beauty blogs and pages, come consequences that can lead to degraded mental health as one of the major problems pertaining to our society is body-shaming.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper concludes that most young adults experience body-shaming on social media. This should be frowned upon by the public, for its ability to cause low self -esteem, dysmorphic disorder, eating disorder and other related consequences. Immediate action must be taken to truncate this issue once and for all.

The study recommends as follows:

1. Students practice more body positivity and self-affirmation, which is accepting their body the way it is because they have only got one. They should note that there is no ideal or perfect body.
2. Students should be taken to workshops and awareness programs where they should be guided about self-esteem, self-recognition and self-confidence.
3. Public awareness programs on the negative effects of body shaming should be promoted by the government.
4. National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) should censor contents that may likely lead to Body shaming.

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