The Relationship Between Body Shaming and Female Political Participation in Ghana: A Case Study of Female Students at the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the relationship between body shaming and female political participation in Ghana. The study adopted the correlational research design and the quantitative research approach. The convenient sampling technique was used to select 333 respondents from whom data was gathered through an online survey with the aid of a questionnaire. The study used descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation to analyze the data with the aid of SPSS version 26. The study found a high prevalence of body shaming against female students. Also, the study observed a low level of political participation among female students. Furthermore, it was discovered that body shaming has a strong negative relationship with female political participation. The study concludes by making recommendations for policy and practice.

Keywords – Body shaming, Decision making, Democracy, Female participation, and Politics.

INTRODUCTION

Political participation is defined as the activities performed voluntarily by individuals or the public to influence public policy (Parry et al., 1992). Political participation could also refer to actions taken by individuals within a jurisdiction to directly influence decision-making and the formulation of policies or manipulate the selection of officeholders who may formulate policies (Ekman and Amnå, 2012). Examples of activities that may promote political participation include voting during elections, contesting for political positions, taking part in peaceful strike actions and demonstrations and participating in political campaigns (Ekman and Amnå, 2012). Political participation has attracted the attention of major international organizations such as the United Nations and developed countries such as the United States of America and countries within the European Union (Ida et al., 2020). Consequently, efforts are being made to widen the scope of political participation among individuals globally. For example, United Nations constantly advocates for the adoption of democratic principles intending to promote and encourage participation where a greater portion of citizens will take part in the decision-making process and hold their leaders accountable (Arpino and Obydenkova, 2020). Also, the United Nations has launched several conventions, resolutions and treatises such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Beijing Platform for Action, International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which are attempts to increase political participation (Agbofa and Justice, 2020).

Irrespective of the attempts made by organizations to promote political participation, a greater section of the citizens does not show much interest in taking part in the decision-making process (Gil de Zúñiga and Diehl, 2019). It is observed that the political process is being choked by wealthier individuals who are better educated and have better socio-economic status Gil de Zúñiga and Diehl, 2019). It is noteworthy that women contribute significantly to societal development through the production of food, raising of children and caring for the aged and taking responsibilities in the corporate world. Similarly, many women have shown a sense of responsibility and demonstrated efforts to close the difference that exists between males and females in the political leadership and the decisions making process (Asekere, 2020). However, a report by the UN Women (2023) indicated that women remain underrepresented at all levels of decision-making globally, and the political gender balance is still a long way off. Asekere (2020) noted that several factors such as financial constraints, sociocultural factors, religious beliefs and the patriarchal nature of most

African societies such as Ghana demotivate and limit the effort of women in participating in politics. This study posits that body shaming may be another factor that limits or discourages females from participating in politics and decision processes in Ghanaian societies.

Body shaming is the act of commenting negatively about physical appearances such as the height, skin colour, hair, weight or size of a person (Arumugam et al., 2022). Body shaming could also be used to describe the situation whereby an individual criticizes his or her physical appearance by comparing it to that of others (Vargas, 2019). There have been several incidences and reports of body shaming directed against females in Ghana. For example, **Gloria Obeng, a public relations officer, shared with Etv Ghana on August 31, 2022, how body shaming led to the loss of her self-confidence** (Owusu-Ackom, 2022). Also, Farida Yusif, a female journalist working with the Citi Newsrooms in Ghana recounted her experience of how she has experienced body shaming throughout her school years from Junior High School to University (Yusif, 2019). This study argues that the perceived attractiveness of the physical appearance of females – females who feel ashamed regarding the way they look, and the tendency for people to comment negatively about the physical appearance of females – females who think others view their appearance negatively – can hinder political participation among females in Ghana.Several scholars and researchers have shown interest by propounding theories and conducting empirical studies that help in explaining the relationship between body shaming and its effects on individuals. For example, Higgins' self-discrepancy theory maintains that individuals may be uncomfortable when they are presented with conflicting beliefs that are incompatible with themselves (Higgins, 1987). Thus, based on the self-discrepancy theory, this study argues that the act of commenting negatively about the physical appearance of females through the incidence of body shaming may present a different self-image to females which can make them uncomfortable in participating in politics. Also, the Civic Voluntarism Model by Verba, et al (1995), recognizes that family and societal influences can determine the level of an individual's political participation. Societies and family can therefore influence female political participation through the incidence of body shaming.

Empirically, Gam et al. (2020) conducted a study on the prevalence and predictors of body shaming among adolescents in Lucknow, India. The study found that about 44% of adolescents who participated in the study had experienced body shaming within the last 12 months before the study. The study also found that body shaming was prevalent even among girls in same-sex schools. Thus, the findings suggest that females experienced the act of body shaming from their colleagues' females. This is contrary to the general notion that body shaming against females is mainly caused by males (Calogero, 2004). Also, Li (2021) focused on how body shaming occurs among males and females within modern urban Chinese society. The study found that body shaming against females mainly accused females of being inadequate if they fail to meet the standards or parameters that define beauty in society. It was also found that body shaming among males mainly occurs in "sissy and masculinity". The author concluded that body shaming towards either males or females is a manifestation of a form of discrimination against women. Moreover, Willson and Kerr (2022) concentrated on how body shaming affects the emotional stability of female athletes. It was found that female athletes experience body shaming which leads to social comparison, and reduction in the level of joy and influence female athletes to adopt excessive body control measures. Thus, the foregoing suggests that body shaming is prevalent in our societies and it is mostly directed against females. It is noteworthy that some studies have been done on the impacts of body shaming on the achievement of females, however, these studies barely focused on the relationship between body shaming and political participation among females. It is against this backdrop that this study explores the relationship between body shaming and female political participation in Ghana.

Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence level of body shaming among female students at the University of Education, Winneba?
2. What is the level of political participation among female students at the University of Education, Winneba?
3. What is the relationship between body shaming and political participation among female students at the University of Education, Winneba?

Research Objectives

1. To assess the prevalence level of body shaming among female students at the University of Education, Winneba.
2. To assess the level of political participation among female students at the University of Education, Winneba.
3. To examine the relationship between body shaming and political participation among female students at the University of Education, Winneba.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical review

Self-discrepancy theory

The self-discrepancy theory propounded by Higgins (1987) posits that individuals in society compare their actual self to the ideal self. The self-discrepancy theory maintains that individuals may be uncomfortable when they are presented with conflicting beliefs that are incompatible with themselves (Higgins, 1987). Higgins (1987) assumes that there are three main domains of self, which include the actual self, the ideal self and the ought self. The actual self represents the features and qualities that individuals agree that they sincerely possess (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer and Nyffenegger, 2011). In other words, the actual self could be interpreted as the true self of an individual. The ideal self refers to the attributes and features that an individual would like to possess. The ideal self usually comes to the individual after comparing him or herself to other individuals within the society. Thus, an individual may want to obtain the qualities of others after several comparisons with the physical and emotional attributes of other people in society (Malär et al., 2011). The ought self describes the features that that people believe should be possessed by other individuals. The different kinds of self are different and may be influenced by factors such as role, culture and society (Malär et al., 2011).

Higgins (1987) indicated that individuals view the ideal self as obligatory. Thus, individuals often assume that it is mandatory to possess the attributes projected by society as best. Individuals may thus, desire to appear or exhibit these attributes projected by society to be accepted. This theory is relevant to this study because it recognizes the role of self-identification in individuals' achievement. Based on the self-discrepancy theory, this study argues that the act of commenting negatively about the physical appearance of females through the incidence of body shaming may present a different self-image to females. Body shaming serves as an act through which society presents the ought self to females. Thus, females may feel uncomfortable and less confident in participating in politics because they have not attained the ought self. Other scholars such as Riggle and Gouws (2003) used the self-discrepancy theory to study the issue of political intolerance in South Africa. The study found that the discrepancy between the actual self and the ought self is a major cause of political intolerance. Also, Sun and Guo (2014) used the self-discrepancy theory in their study on individuals' involvement in fashion clothing festivals. The study found that individuals with low levels of self-discrepancy had negative attitudes towards fashion clothing and less participated in such activities. Similarly, this study adopts self-discrepancy to examine the relationship between body and female political participation.

Civic and Voluntarism Model

The Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) is associated with Verba, Schlozman and Brady (Verba et al., 1995). The CVM argues that though individuals in society may have equal rights to influence government decisions, the participation of individuals is voluntary. Verba et al. (1995) further observed a great disparity in participation among different groups in society. The CVM assumes that the participation of citizens in political activities is influenced by factors such as resources, recruitment networks and psychological engagement.

Verba et al. (1995) defined resources to include the time, civic skills and money that enable individuals to participate in politics. Also, psychological engagement deals with the desire or motivation of individuals to participate in political activities. Factors of psychological engagement may include family and societal

influences, partisanship, political efficacy and political interest. Furthermore, Verba et al. (1995) defined recruitment as the level of individuals' exposure to political activities and the mechanism for an invitation to participate in political activities. Recruitment networks may deal with a person's connection with institutions such as religious, professional and religious associations (Verba et al., 1995). Thus, recruitment networks serve as a point whereby individuals are recruited into the political process.

Verba et al. (1995) argue that citizens who possess resources may show greater political participation than those with lesser resources. Moreover, people with greater psychological motivation are more likely to participate actively in politics than persons with little or no psychological motivation. At this point, it could be asserted that individuals with a combination of resources and psychological motivation may have a greater probability of participating in politics. Moreover, people who belong to recruitment networks are more likely to be recruited into political activities than those who do not join any political networks (Verba et al., 1995).

The CVM is adopted for this study because it recognizes phycological factors as a major determinant of individuals' political participation. Moreover, the CVM recognizes that family and societal influences can determine the level of an individual's political participation. In this study, the researchers argue that family and society can influence female political participation through the act of body shaming. Thus, society's act of body shaming may have a psychological influence on females and affect their motivation to participate in politics. The CVM was used by Barkan (2004) to explain the support of the public towards environmental movement through a systematic literature review. The study found that the CVM best explain the public support towards environmental movements. Barkan (2004) used the CVM to study the behaviours of individuals to participate in political crowdfunding. The study revealed that resources such as time, technology and finance and psychological factors significantly influence individuals' behaviour towards political crowdfunding. Similarly, this study uses the CVM to examine whether body shaming influences female political participation.

Conceptual review

Body shaming

Body shaming is the act of commenting negatively about the physical appearance such as the height, skin colour, hair, weight or size of a person (Arumugam et al., 2022). Body shaming could also be used to describe the situation whereby an individual criticizes her physical appearance by comparing it to that of others (Vargas, 2019). The definition by Vargas (2019) indicates that body shaming may not only be a comment from another person on the physical appearance of individuals, thus individuals may feel ashamed of their physical appearance or body without any negative comments from others. This situation of body shaming occurs when an individual compares her body to others. For Arumugam et al. (2022), body shaming is the act of attacking, teasing or mocking the appearance of an individual. Body shaming is usually directed towards both males and females in society; however, females are usually body-shamed (Arumugam et al., 2022). Body shaming may occur because society has a definition for the body size and shape that is regarded as adequate or standard and people who do not have these body shapes and sizes are usually body shamed (Gam et al., 2020). This affirms what was observed by Choudhary (2018) who observed that societies in Western countries perceived thinness and youthfulness as the ideal body shape for women. Women are forced to meet these body shape standards or feel uncomfortable and less self-confident and see themselves as failures (Choudhary, 2018). Similarly, Li (2021) indicated that body shaming against females mainly accused them of being inadequate if they fail to meet the standards or parameters that define beauty in society.

The evidence of body shaming has been witnessed for a long time within society (Li, 2021). The prevalence of body shaming has increased in recent times with the emergence of social media applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok (Wang et al., 2020). This is because the increase in the usage of mass media makes room for social comparison such as the physical appearance and body image of individuals (Wang et al., 2021). Statistics revealed by the Obesity Action Coalition, a non-governmental organization, indicated that about 58% and 63% of male and female adolescents respectively have

experienced bullying because of their body size globally (Cox, 2022). Gam et al. (2020) indicated that about 44% of adolescents in India have experienced a kind of body shaming at least, once a year. Though the problem of body shaming within society is directly against both males and females, much often, females are mostly affected (Li et al., 2020). Moreover, body shaming may make the victims feel insecure in the physical environment and may withdraw from physical, social and emotional interaction with others within the environment.

Tenkorang and Okyere (2022) observed that most female students at the University of Cape Coast have experienced body shaming before. The authors further indicated that most of the female students who participated in their study did not have a good perception of their body image and were unsatisfied with the size, shape and height of their physical appearance. Most of the students indicated that they were not having a perfect body image (Tenkorang and Okyere, 2022). It could be inferred from the findings of Tenkorang and Okyere (2022) that most female students in Ghanaian Universities have fragile body image which implies that any negative comments directed towards their physical appearance may lead to reduced self-image. This is because dissatisfaction with the body type can affect the self-esteem and confidence level of university students which can lead to poor academic performance, participation and social relations (Bruce, 2016). Also, Hariyat et al. (2022) explored the relationship between body shaming and self-blaming among students affects students who blame themselves. The study found that students usually experience body shaming and blame themselves.

Political participation

The concept of participation is deemed as a development approach that recognizes the need to integrate individuals who are disadvantaged in society in the formulation and implementation of policies that seek to improve their well-being (Iyer-Raniga and Treloar, 2001). Political participation has gained the interest of many researchers and organizations due to the increasing support for democratic development. Larry Diamond conceptualized democracy as a system of governance that provides equal opportunity for all individuals to participate in politics more competitively and fairly (Arpino and Obydenkova, 2020). Thus, from the perspective of Larry Diamond, participation is a key aspect of democratic development. Verba and Nie (1987) expounded that there is little democracy when few people take decisions and formulate and implement policies, hence the more individuals participate in decision-making and policy formulation, the more democracy there is. Participation could therefore be regarded as an indispensable aspect of democracy as it is seen as a major means of democratic development (Verba and Nie, 1987).

Arowolo and Aluko (2010) opined that political participation in every society – developed or developing – seeks to obtain power, dispense power or influence the formulation of policies that are of keen interest to the individual. It is an involuntary activity performed by individuals to influence the acquisition of power, selection of governmental officeholders and decision-making process (Verba and Nie, 1987). In a broader sense, participation is described as the "citizen power". The power of the citizens to influence the existing power structures to make their voices heard, their desires considered and their needs met (van Deth, 2016). Examples of political participation may include activities such as signing a petition, voting during elections, contesting for a political position, taking part in a demonstration or taking part in a political discussion (Ekman and Amnå, 2012). Thus, political participation seeks to directly or indirectly influence the formulation and implementation of policies. This is in line with the definition of van Deth (2016) who conceptualized political participation as the activities by citizens to affect politics. It is noteworthy that the voluntary nature of political participation means that individuals do not engage in political activities based on the orders of the ruling class or the demands of the law (van Deth, 2016). Also, political participation describes the activities performed by individuals who do not hold political offices such as politicians or bureaucrats, but rather non-professionals and amateurs (van Deth, 2016). From the foregoing, this study defines political participation as the active involvement of ordinary individuals – who may not be part of the executive, legislative, judiciary or bureaucratic powers – in the decision-making concerning the selection of political leaders and formulation of policies in the society.

Female political participation

Women's participation has been among major international discussions since the mid-17th century when

women began to agitate for political rights (Gowing, 2021). For example, women's movements were formed during the French Revolution and fought for the rights of women to participate in politics and the decision-making process (Landes, 1988). The agitation of these movements yielded the required results when countries such as the USA and the British granted voting rights to women during the mid-19th century (Landes, 1988). The implementation of the UN's Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1954 increased granting more women in other countries the right to participate in politics (Gowing, 2021).

The promotion of women's political participation continues to be a major concern to major development stakeholders such as the United Nations, World Bank and governments of states (Bent, 2013). In this study, women's political participation is defined as the active involvement and engagement of women in the making of decisions that affect their lives. It is also noteworthy that, women political participation is used interchangeably with female political participation in this study. Women can participate in politics through their engagement in activities such as voting during elections, contesting for a political position or vying to hold political office, among others (van Deth, 2016). Women's political participation is regarded as a major requirement for political development and democratic consolidation. Women make up more than 50% of the world's total population, hence the promotion of women's participation in politics may not only enhance and encourage political development but may also improve the quality and standard of women's life in society (Sabbagh, 2005). Kassa (2015) asserted that women's political participation at all levels of decision-making is the major means through which the world can achieve equality, development and peace.

Several international declarations and treatises have been issued to address the marginalization of females at the various levels of political participation and to offer them the opportunity to influence decision-making (Asekere, 2020). For example, international conventions, treaties and resolutions such as the Beijing Platform for Action; International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have been put introduced to improve women's participation in politics globally (Asekere, 2020; Agomor, 2016).

According to the statistics published by UN Women (2023) female political participation is generally low globally as women remain underrepresented at all levels of decision-making globally. 34 women hold executive positions as the Heads of State or government in countries in the world. This indicates the quest to achieve gender equality at the highest decision-making institutions may not be achieved within the next 130 years (UN Women, 2023). It is further observed that about 22.8% of cabinet ministers are women and there are only 13 countries where more than 50% of cabinet ministers are women. The most common cabinet ministries held by women include the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality and the Ministry of Children and Social Protection (UN Women, 2023). Thus, though some women serve as cabinet ministers, they are usually limited to issues that men may not be efficient in handling them.

The report indicated that 26.5% of parliamentary seats are occupied by women globally. This shows an improvement of about 15.6% of parliamentary seats occupied by women in 1997 globally. Six countries have more than 50% of national parliamentary seats occupied by women with Rwanda topping the list with 61% of national parliamentary occupied by women (UN Women, 2023). This statistic shows that other African countries could imitate the practices of Rwanda and give women greater opportunities to participate in politics.

Female Political Participation in Ghana

Ghana is regarded as one of the leading countries in Africa in terms of democratic development (Greene, 2020). The country has conducted eight successful and peaceful elections under its 4th republic since 1992 (Greene, 2020). The development and consolidation of democracy in Ghana are not without greater concern for women's political participation. Several measures and initiatives have been introduced to ensure that women take an active part in politics and the decision-making process at all levels in Ghana (Amoah-Boampong, 2016). indicated that Ghana is part of the African countries to approve several international declarations and conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women that seeks to guarantee greater human rights to women and promote greater women's

political participation. Also, the 1992 Constitution of Ghana promotes the rights of all citizens to participate in politics. For instance, sections 17 and 27 of Ghana's 1992 constitution makes provisions that prohibit discrimination between gender and highlights the rights of women to participate in politics (Amoah-Boampong, 2016). The consideration of affirmative action in the 1992 constitution of Ghana had yielded some positive results to some extent. Some women have been appointed to occupy high-profile political positions such as the chairperson of Ghana's electoral commission, the Chief Justice and the minister of Justice and Attorney General (Amoah-Boampong, 2016). However, not much success has been attained concerning women's representation in parliament. The trend of women's representation in Ghana since the inception of the 4th Republic is presented in Figure 1 below.
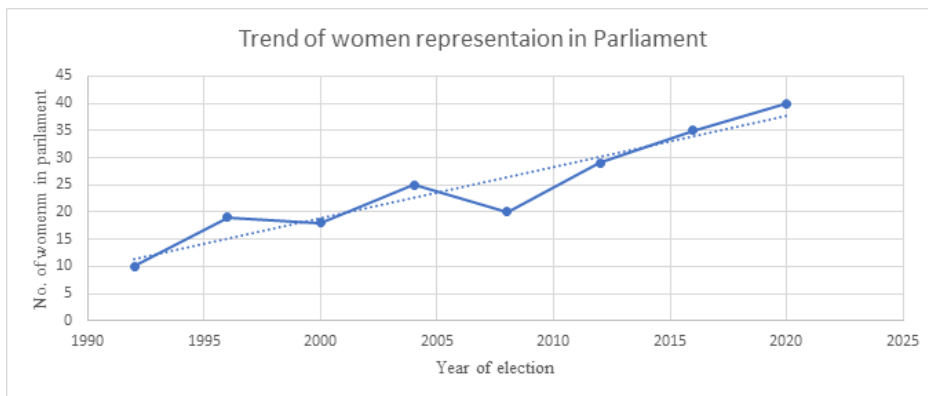
Chart 1: Trend of women's representation in Parliament in Ghana (Asekere, 2020; UN Women, 2023).

shaming and political participation among female students. Female political participation is treated as the dependent variable whiles body shaming is treated as the independent variable. This design is used in this study to determine whether a change in body shaming affects female political participation. The correlational design is used because it allows the study to identify the relation and forecast future occurrences from the current data and knowledge.

Research approach

A quantitative research approach is used in this study. The quantitative approach describes the approach used to inquire into a phenomenon through the collection of data that can be quantified. It deals with the quantification and analysis of numerical data to obtain results (Isreal,1992). Zachary et al. (2020) noted that the quantitative method is used when the primary emphasis of the study is to depict, or forecast, while the investigator distances himself from the research to prevent skewing the findings. Therefore, the quantitative approach is used in this study to predict the relationship between body shaming and female political participation through the collection and analysis of numerical data.

Sample size and sampling technique

Convenience sampling is used to select the respondents for this study. Convenient sampling is a method that is used to select respondents to participate in a study basically because such respondents can be easily accessed by the researcher (Stratton, 2021). Convenient sampling is informed by factors such as the willingness of the respondents to participate in the study and the proximity of respondents (Stratton, 2021). The study sent the questionnaire to the respondents via various WhatsApp group pages and emails of the targeted respondents. The respondents who were willing and responded to the study were included. The It is observed from Figure 1 that there has been a steady increase in the number of women representations in parliament. It is observed that only 5 females were represented in parliament in the first election under the 4 th Republic of Ghana. Apusigah (2004) indicated that though 23 women contested to be elected into parliament during the 1992 general elections, only 5 women out of 200 representatives, representing 5% were elected. The number of women parliamentarians increased by 14 in the subsequent election which saw the number of women in parliament increase to 19 during the 2nd parliament of the fourth republic However, the number of women MPs decreased to 18 during the 2000 elections. Also, 25 women were elected to represent in parliament which was again decreased to 20 during the 2008 elections. This shows that women's

representation has not been consistent since the 1992 elections. It also observed that 29 and 35 women were elected into parliament during the 2012 and 2016 elections respectively. Moreover, 40 women were elected into parliament during the 2020 elections. From Figure 1, observed that the number of women representations in parliament has witnessed an increment during the last three elections. However, there is still a huge gender disparity in parliamentary representation as more females who contest parliamentary elections often loss to their male counterparts. For example, within the last two general elections; 35 and 40 women were elected into parliament respectively out of a total of 275 seats in parliament Sowah et al.(2023). Thus, though the number of female representations in parliament is increasing, more measuresshould be put in place to ensure greater female participation and fair women representation in parliament.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study makes use of the correlation research design. The correlational research design examines the relationship that may exist between variables without any intention of the researcher to control or manipulate any of the variables (Fitzgerald et al., 2004). The results of the correlation may be positive, negative, or no correlation. In simple terms, this design is used to determine whether a change in one variable causes a change in another variable and the degree or extent to which the change occurs (Fitzgerald et al., 2004). The correlational design is used in this study to examine the relationship between body study gathered data from 333 respondents. A sample size of 333 is deemed suitable for a population of 2000 when the researcher seeks to attain a precision of ±5% (Isreal, 1992). The research population comprised all female students at the Faculty of Social Science of the University of Education Winneba, Ghana.

Instruments and data collection procedure

The study gathered primary data from respondents with the use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed with a Google form and consisted of three main sections. Section I gathered data on the demographic characteristics of respondents. Section II gathered data on the prevalence of body shaming among females. Section II of the questionnaire was adapted from Arumugam et al. (2022). The section contained 10 items, patterned after a five-point Likert scale where strongly disagree was rated at 1 and strongly agree was rated at 5. Section III of the questionnaire focused on the level of political participation among female students. Section III was adapted from Kern et al. (2013) and consisted of 8 items pattern after a five-point Likert ranging from Never = 1 and always = 5.

Data for the study was gathered through an online survey. The Google form questionnaire was sent to respondents via WhatsApp pages and emails of respondents. The online survey covered a period of two months, from March 4 to May 4, 2023. The two months were necessary because it gave ample time for the questionnaire to reach a greater number of respondents. The researchers received a total of 376 questionnaires from respondents.

Data analysis

The data received from Google Forms were extracted into an Excel sheet. The data were then cleansed whereby all incomplete records were removed from the data set. After, the removal of all erroneous and incomplete data, the data was then transferred into SPSS version 26.0 for analysis. The descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data and the results were presented in frequency tables, mean and standard deviations. The mean score was used because it could help to ascertain the prevalence level of body shaming and female political participation. The mean score range of 0-1.89, 1.90-2.69, 2.70-3.49, 3.50-4.29, and 4.30-5.0 were interpreted as Very Low, Low, High, Very High and Extremely High respectively (Zaki et al., 2021). The study used Pearson's correlation to determine the relationship between body shaming and female political participation. In performing the correlational analysis, the study calculated the average of all responses for each respondent for all 10 items and 8 items for body shaming and female political participation respectively with the help of Excel. The average of the responses on body shaming was used as the independent variable and the average of the responses on political participation was used as the dependent variable.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics included in this study are the ages of respondents, department of respondents, and level of respondents. The data obtained are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Variable	N	Per cent
Age of respondents		
15-20	26	7.8
21-25	218	65.5
26-30	83	24.9
More than 35 years	6	1.8
Department of respondents		
Political Science Education	90	27.0
Economics Education	79	23.7
Geography Education	38	11.4
History Education	73	21.9
Social studies Education	53	15.9
Level of respondents		
Level 100	90	27.0
Level 200	109	32.7
Level 300	97	29.1
Level 400	37	11.1

Prevalence of Body Shaming

This section examined the prevalence level of body shaming among female students. The results obtained are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Prevalence of Body Shaming

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Being called fat	333	1.00	5.00	3.5045	1.25059
2. Being called skinny	333	1.00	5.00	3.5976	1.25400
3. Bodyweight is not in harmony with height	333	1.00	5.00	2.5766	1.01687
4. Not having a slim appearance	333	1.00	43.00	2.6937	2.51547
5. Not having a suitable height	333	1.00	43.00	3.6186	2.48887
6. Being muscular (Having a male-like appearance)	333	1.00	5.00	1.8438	.83211
7. Disliking hair texture	333	1.00	5.00	3.8589	.86840
8. Disliking the shape of the eye	333	1.00	5.00	2.9249	.85574
9. Not having a flat tummy	333	1.00	5.00	3.7598	.96127
10. Not having a suitable butt	333	.00	5.00	4.0300	.90464
Overall Mean	333	2.30	11.00	3.1952	.51733

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents agreed with statement 1 which indicates that most female students are called fat. Also, the means score for the statement shows that the majority of the respondents agreed with statement 2, i.e., being called skinny. Furthermore, the mean score for statement 3 shows that most of the

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respondents disagreed of being mocked of body weight is not in harmony with height. Also, most of the means score of 2.6937 for statement 4 shows that the majority of the respondents disagreed with being mocked for not having a slim appearance. Furthermore, the mean score of 3.6186 for statement 5 shows that most of the respondents agreed to mocked of not having a suitable height. Also, the means core of 1.8438 indicates that the majority of the respondents strongly disagreed with being mocked for being muscular or having a male-like appearance. The findings also indicate that the majority of the respondents, represented by a mean score of 3.8589 disliked their hair texture. It could further be observed that most of the respondents were indifferent about the shape of their eyes. Table 2 also shows that most of the respondents agreed (i.e., 3.7598) to being mocked for not having a flat tummy. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents agreed to be teased for not having a suitable butt.

Level of Female Political Participation

The findings on the level of female political participation are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Level of female political participation					
	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
11. Contest for a political position	333	1.00	5.00	2.1922	1.45381
12. Work in a political party/ action group	333	1.00	5.00	2.2312	1.61058
13. Sign a petition	333	1.00	5.00	2.3123	1.71766
14. Take part in a demonstration	333	1.00	5.00	2.7195	1.55533
15. Boycott certain products	333	1.00	5.00	2.1261	1.50771
16. Vote during elections	333	1.00	5.00	3.7556	1.86456
17. Campaign for a political candidate	333	1.00	5.00	2.2913	1.68153
18. Discuss political issues	333	1.00	5.00	3.5492	1.65950
Overall Mean	333	1.00	5.00	2.5097	1.38732

Source: Field data (2023)

Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents indicated that they would rarely contest political positions to be elected during elections. Also, most of the respondents indicated that would rarely work in a political party or action group. Moreover, the majority of the respondents indicated that they rarely sign a petition while a majority of the respondents expressed that they would sometimes take part in a demonstration. Most of the respondents also indicated that they rarely boycott a particular product whiles the majority indicated that they would often vote during elections. It is also observed that most of the respondents indicated that they would rarely campaign for a political candidate while a majority of the indicated that they would often discuss political issues.

Relationship Between Body Shaming and Female Political Participation

This section examined the relationship between body shaming and female political participation among female students. The results of Pearson's correlation are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation between body shaming and political participation			
		Body Shaming	Political participation
Body Shaming	Pearson Correlation	1	-.802
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.063
	N	333	333
Political participation	Pearson Correlation	-.802	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.063	
	N	333	333

Source: Field data (2023)

From Table 4 it is observed that the Pearson Coefficient (i.e., r = -0.802) shows that there is a negative correlation between Body shaming and female political participation. The negative coefficient implies that the increment in one variable leads to a decrease in another variable. It could thus the asserted that an increase in body shaming leads to a decrease in female political participation. Moreover, since the correlation coefficient ranges between -1 and +1, a coefficient closer to 1 indicates a stronger correlation. Thus, the coefficient of -0.802 shown in this study indicates a strong negative correlation between body shaming and female political participation.

DISCUSSION

It is observed that the most common form of body shaming against female are directed towards body parts such as tummy and butts. The overall mean score (i.e., 3.1952) for the responses indicates that the level of body shaming among female students could be described as High. This finding is similar to what was observed by Tenkorang and Okyere (2022) who found a high prevalence of body shaming among female students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Thus, it could be inferred that body shaming against females is common among Universities in Ghana. Similarly, Gam et al. (2020) also found a high prevalence of body shaming among adolescents in India. A study conducted by Yahoo Health with 2000 participants revealed that about 94% of females between the ages of 13 and 64 have experienced body shaming of one kind or another (Schlüter et al., 2021).

Ramadhany and Putri (2021) discovered a very high prevalence of body shaming among students in Indonesia. These studies show an increasing prevalence of body shaming against females in many societies globally. The increase in body shaming behaviours in societies across the world could be attributed to the increase in the usage of social media among individuals within society (Ramadhany and Putri, 2021). Arumugam et al. (2022) observed that social media serve as the main medium through which female journalists in Pakistan are trolled through body shaming. In their study, Vargas (2019). observed the most common form of body shaming is experienced through cyberbullying. The internet may have promoted body shaming because victims post their pictures on various social media platforms to receive admiration and praise from friends and other social media users. However, most of these comments turn out to be negative (Vargas, 2019). The foregoing suggests that the incidence of body shaming against females may continue to prevail in our societies if innovative measures are not implemented to deal with it.

The findings also showed that voting during elections and discussion of political issues are the common forms of political activities performed by female students. The overall mean score (i.e., 2.5097) shows that the majority of the respondents rarely participate in politics which could also be interpreted as low political participation among female students. This is contrary to the findings of Agbofa and Justice (2020) who found moderate political participation among female students at the Seventh Day Adventist College of Education in Ghana. Nevertheless, the findings of this current study and that of Agbofa and Justice (2020) show that female students do not show much interest towards political participation. It is noteworthy that these female students will migrate into mainstream politics and be elected to hold key political positions at the local and national levels. It is therefore not a surprise that; female political participation is also low the mainstream politics in Ghana. For example, only 40 out of 275 (i.e., 14.55%) members of parliament in the 8 [th] Parliament of Ghana are females (UN Women, 2023).

The situation is similar in other African countries. For example, Kenyatta (2023) observed that women are underrepresented in political positions in Kenya. Also, Ake et al. (2019) underscored the low level of female political participation in Nigeria. Thus, it could be argued that though female political participation has increased in the last three decades, most African countries have lower levels of female political participation compared to males. Other non-African countries such as India, Germany, Pakistan, and Jordan have lower levels of female political participation (Latif et al, 2020; Alelaimat, 2019, Zank, 2014). It could be thus, asserted that the issue of lower female political participation is not a problem for only Ghana, nor is it a problem for only African countries. The foregoing discussion indicates that the issue of lower female political participation is a global problem that should not be left to be handled by any single country, but rather should be tackled through global collective efforts.

The correlation analysis showed that there is a strong negative relationship between body shaming and female political participation. The implication is that the increase in body shaming among females reduces female political participation. Several studies have found that body shaming has adverse effects on its victims. For example, Willson and Kerr (2022) found that the body reduces the self-confidence of its victims. Also, Gam et al (2020) observed of the females who experienced body shaming were unwilling to go to school as they withdraw from participating in any social activity. The discrepancy theory also argued that body shaming may make victims lose their self-esteem and self-confidence which can reduce the active participation of such victims in political activities (Higgins, 1987). Thus, the findings of this study support the argument of the self-discrepancy theory. Also, the Civic Voluntarism Model recognize that psychological factors can influence the level of political participation (Verba and Nie, 1987). In this study, it is found that body shaming has a strong negative relationship with political participation. It is thus, argued that body shaming may have psychological effects such as loss of self-confidence and self-esteem in females (Willson and Kerr, 2022) which may reduce the level of female political participation. Previous studies such as (Asamoah, 2014; Choudhary, 2018; Islam and Islam, 2012; Kassa, 2015) discovered that factors such as the patriarchal nature of societies, lack of financial resources, lack of motivation and low level of education hinder female political participation. This current study adds that body shaming against women is also another factor that influences female political participation.

CONCLUSION

Female political participation is a major factor that determines democratic development (Agbofa and Justice, 2020). The participation of females in politics determines the extent to which the interest of females is represented and included in the decision-making process (Agbofa and Justice, 2020). Local and international organizations such as United Nations (UN), UN Women, and the World Bank Group have initiated measures to augment the participation of women in politics and decision-making globally (Ida et al., 2020). However, studies have discovered that women are underrepresented in major levels of decision-making, especially in developing countries such as Ghana (Asekere, 2020). It is discovered that lower educational levels, lack of financial resources and patriarchy are some of the factors that impede female political participation (Asekere, 2020). This study concludes by stating that body shaming against women is also a major factor that influences female political participation in Ghana. The increasing incidence of body shaming in most Ghanaian societies implies that more females would show less interest in taking part in politics and the decision-making process if innovative measures are not implemented. This study, therefore, makes the following recommendations;

In the first place, it is recommended to stakeholders of women and gender development to create awareness among females to accept their physical appearance and reject any negative comments from the external environment about their physical appearance. This will ensure that negative comments from people do not negatively affect the self-confidence and self-esteem of females. Also, the study recommends the creation of awareness of the need for individuals to accept their physical appearance. This will make people understand and appreciate the physical appearance of females in society and desist from any form of body shaming behaviours. Furthermore, women should be empowered and motivated to participate in politics. This empowerment could be achieved through education and the awareness creation of the need for females to be represented in the decision-making process. It could also be achieved through the provision of financial resources to females to contest key political positions during local and national elections.

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