Fostering Social Inclusivity by Mitigating Body Shaming

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Introduction

As the world developed its portal of communication through interactions via various media platforms, the problem regarding body shaming has been strikingly increasing since then. By definition, body shaming is the act or practice of subjecting someone to criticism or mockery for supposed bodily faults or imperfections. With technologies allowing an influx of information through social media platforms and the prevalence of pop media, it has made it harder for people to accept themselves for whom they are after going through passive-aggressive judging comments, or in other words, body shaming—the act of criticizing overall body-appearance for not meeting specifics of societal standards. Comparing themselves regularly to retouched images of celebrities with seemingly flawless bodies and faces negatively impacts on one's mental health, making it essential for the public to reduce body shaming. Rather than letting people divide between "fat" and "skinny," mitigating body shaming by bringing positivity into everybody's form will promote social inclusivity.

Background

Many are distressed by their body image—underweight, overweight, curvy, muscular, tall, short. People go through psychological and physical stress due to the pressure of not fitting into the "beauty standards" passed down from generation to generation. Depending on the culture, sex, age, the standard varies from head to toe.

With technology greatly advanced in the contemporary world, it is now easier for people to receive body shaming through

A fashion organization promoting diverse body types

various media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube. While it used to be an issue that only celebrities deal with, it is now no surprise that all genders are dealing with the problem of body shaming, a global issue to be mitigated. Pictures, comments, articles, and videos constantly feed society with criticisms, lowering an individuals' self-esteem. Body shaming has people exposed to severe health risks, such as anorexia or bulimia, a problem which people tries to restrict themselves from consuming food. Moreover, to foster social inclusivity, it is crucial for people to recognize the severity of the issue by

Problems Raised

Problems have been raised in the continent of Africa. Mauritania has a special beauty standard of favoring plumpish body shapes. Despite the fact that the country is plagued with food shortages and severe droughts, most Mauritanian girls aging from five to nineteen go through Leblouh, which is a practice of force-feeding girls to achieve an obese body shape. Girls are culturally pressured to gain weight as it is predicted that the heavier the girl, the higher prospect she will have for marriage. Parents are overjoyed when their daughter's gain weight and often brag about their weights.

During the fattening process, most girls are sent off to fat camps in the desert in which they are required to eat a diet of 16,000 calories a day, which is more than the average calory that an adult should consume. The camp overseers force the girls to drink and eat multiple times a day and instruct them to limit their physical activities. A refusal to comply with the cultural practice will result in physical and mental torturing. If their stomachs are

A child going through the practice of Leblouh

unable to adapt to massive eating, they are given a concoction of pills to obtain the same result as other girls. This process is known as a "chemical gavage," where girls are given growth hormones, contraceptives, and steroid hormones to bulk up. Although Leblouh has brought serious adverse effects, such as heart failure, kidney failure, diabetes, women's reproductive problems, joint pain, and a campaign against child abuse to bring awareness of the health risks of obesity has been made by the government, it has never been outlawed.

International Actions

Numerous organizations have been made to foster society to not be confined to the internet society. The body-positive movement, #Body positivity addresses individual voices and organizations regarding the issues of body image for folks of all sizes. Their movement has been active since 2012 for the purpose of allowing people to have autonomy in their physical form despite the beauty standards.

Inhabiting our own beauty gives confidence, allowing people to see the beauty in others without the distraction of competitive comparisons. Expressing our beauty doesn't make us conceited and separate from others. Thus, self-esteem and self-acceptance is crucial to gain positive body image because they have to be able to appreciate and respect their body.

Key Players

South Korea

Society and mass media constantly bombard the people with images that idealize a certain body type. These unrealistic images often cause young individuals to have a conflicted relationship with their bodies, resulting them to hate their bodies. The K-Pop industry has been extending its influence worldwide with great popularity. With the frequent exposure of (female) artists, who weigh an average of 46.5kg, many are pressured to keep their bodies aligned with

Eating Disorder, restricting themselves from eating

the singers through extensive exercise and diets, which develops anorexia or bulimia nervosa. On the flip side, some artists have been "skinny shamed." Not only are female artists in target of criticisms, but plenty of male artists were mortified being called "un-manly" with no manly features.

"The perfect Korean body, as portrayed through media and Korean dramas, seems to be androgynous, very slim and minimalistic with long straight hair." Moreover, clothing stores in South Korea are "one size fits all," and that one size is small. Finding clothes larger than a US women's size six is challenging, especially since the starting point for "plus-size."

United States of America

With Hollywood being the biggest entertainment industry in the world located in Los Angeles, there are plenty of actors seeking to get a line in the movie. Body shaming is oftentimes a problem that rise because there are cases where actors are asked to lose weight to get "fit" for a certain movie or a character on film. When the audience regards the actor as a "good fitting" actor, noticing the actor's body during off-season brings hate comments on social media. Serious legal actions were taken as a defense to those criticizing negative comments regarding their body to end body shaming.

Saudi Arabia Women in their normal attire

Saudi Arabia

One of the countries that are most satisfied with their body shape are Muslim states, where women's clothing cultures is very different to from other society. Women in Saudi Arabia wear the abaya in public, which covers every part of their bodies but their eyes. While their culture may seem oppressive, but ultimately, it's liberating for women to be removed from the public pressure to appear a certain way.

Mauritania

African countries that have serious drought issues, such as Mauritania, has the desire to keep their people with plumped appearance. Obesity synonymous with wealth and beauty. To sustain their beauty, the practice of leblouh has been a popular exercise that has been made to young girls, which are done by force feeding them with excessive calories.

Possible Solutions

As there are many aspects to this problem, many solutions can be proposed. Among the numerous problems that exist within this issue, the three of the gravest are the following:

1. Create body positivity campaigns to raise awareness to the public that images posted online is only an "ideal" body shape.
2. People should be cautious of commenting on other people's bodies as it can be heard as criticism depending on the beauty standards that they have.
3. Have media platforms to post reminders of respectful comments or entirely block the comment section.

Healthy outlook and behaviours, as it is easier to lead a balanced lifestyle with healthier attitudes and practices relating to food and exercise when you are in tune with, and respond to the needs of your body.

Glossary

Body Shaming: humiliating someone by making mocking or critical comments about their body shape or size through media or face to face contact.

Body Positivity: a social movement initially created to challenge the ways in which society presents and views the physical body. For example, popularizing overweight women and men.

Beauty Standards: the socially constructed notion of attractiveness in appearance that one should strive to achieve and maintain.

Leblouh: the practice of force-feeding girls from as young as five to nineteen, in countries where obesity was traditionally regarded as desirable.

Timeline

1689 – First two case of anorexia was found in England. Each from a girl and a boy.
1960 – The practice of Leblouh, an ancient custom in Africa to force feed girls, began when they gained independence.
2012 – The first Body Positivity movement challenging unrealistic feminine beauty

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