



*What does
body shaming
mean?*

What does body shaming mean?

This educational material has been made by the **Body Shining project** (Erasmus+ KA2 Project, 2020-2-IT03-KA205-019530, funded by the Italian National Agency) through collaborative action and it has been coordinated by MOH, Bari, Italy.

Each of the partners (ANIMUS, ATYPICAL, ELAN, MOH and SMOOTH) made 2 hours workshops with youngsters about the topic of body shaming, in relation to several phenomena such as fat shaming, political bodies, disabling bodies, hate speech and other forms of discrimination. We have collected 200 'critical incidents' about body shaming issues experienced by young people and youth workers, both during workshops and online. Some testimonies tell a detailed story of the incident, others summarize the incidents within a single word or a few words. We would like to thank all the young participants who contributed to the testimonies and the different workshops that took place in Bari, Belfast, Larissa, Paris and Sofia. Without them, this material would not exist.

Contributors of this book:

- Coordination: Eleonora Schulze-Battmann; Isabella Mileti (MOH)
- First chapter (MOH): Isabella Mileti
- Second chapter (ELAN): Candice Dubost; Morgane Boidin
- Third chapter (ATYPICAL): Amy Frazer
- Fourth chapter (ANIMUS): Elena Golemeeva; Margarita Rafailova
- Fifth chapter (SMOOTH): Dimitra Zacharouli

Graphic design and editing: Eleonora Schulze-Battmann



The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

This work subscribes to the concept of "fair use". Fair use is a jurisprudential criterion which allows a limited use of protected material without requiring the permission of the holder of such rights, for example, for academic or informational use.



© Copyright 2022. All rights reserved.

Table of contents

Introduction	5
1. Body and fat shame: get rid of a grassophobic society	7
1.1. Weight stigma: some considerations.....	7
1.2. Fat shaming and Health	9
1.3. Fat shaming and Diet Culture	10
1.4. The effect of shame.....	10
1.5. Fat acceptance movement	11
<i>Testimonies collected in Italy</i>	14
2. The political body: who owns our body? About body shaming, gender and race	19
2.1. Women, men and Body Shaming.....	19
2.2. Body Shaming and gender minorities.....	21
2.3. Gender, Race, Body Shaming: When Discriminations Intersect.....	22
<i>Testimonies collected in France</i>	26
3. Disabling bodies: ableism and the impact of attitude	35
3.1 What is ableism?	35
3.2 Social Model of Disability vs Medical Model of Disability	36
3.3 Stereotypes and Misrepresentation of Disability in the Media.....	36
3.4 Representation of Disability in the media	37
3.5 Attitudes, Hate Speech/Crime and Body Shaming	38
<i>Testimonies collected in Northern Ireland</i>	40
4. The hate speech phenomenon and the ways it reflects on the body.....	44
4.1. Hate Speech and How It Reflects on the Body	47
<i>Testimonies collected in Bulgaria</i>	53
5. The body in the performing arts.....	59
5.1. A Diverse Stage as a Reflection of and Quest for a Wider Society	59
5.2. Fighting Stereotypical Representation of Male and Female Body	

on Stage; Challenging Beauty, Strength, Ability and Youth in Dance and Theatre	60
<i>Testimonies collected in Greece</i>	68

Introduction

This book was produced as part of the “**Body Shining**” Erasmus plus project, which aims to offer youth workers and young people from different cultural/social backgrounds to raise awareness about the act of body shaming, enabling them to **recognize, identify and prevent body shaming**.

“Body Shining” is an outcome of the interest of all **5 European partner organisations** to multiply and improve the tools and abilities in the field of non-formal education with youth at risk of social exclusion, by sharing and combining resources, abilities, experiences and good practices amongst them.

The issue of body shaming and body-positivity has been discussed several times, most of all in the last period. From the need assessment that we conducted, we have noticed that:

1. the concept of body-positivity coincides with the idea of losing weight. “Everyone thinks it’s being ‘confident’, ‘self-love’, but that’s not it: it’s a radical movement, born from the first feminist wave, that promotes the idea that all bodies are valid and that they have the right to respect dignity and representation”;
2. body shaming concerning men and the phenomena of handiphobia are underestimated or misunderstood;
3. although it is a known phenomenon, its manifestations reach very high numbers;
4. there’s a need to explore the reasons behind the discrimination act;
5. there is the need to equip both young and youth workers with tools to prevent and avoid body shaming.

The book is based on stories - “incidents” - narrated by young people and our joint analysis of these incidents. It is **divided into five chapters** reflecting the different topics discussed in depth by the partners during the workshops held. In the first chapter, MOH analyses body and fat shame, while Elan in the second chapter discusses the political body. Thanks to the contribution of Atypical, we face the topic of disabling bodies and the impact of the attitude. In the fourth chapter, Animus explain the hate speech phenomenon and the ways it reflects on the body. Finally, in the last chapter, Smouth talks about the body in the performing arts.

During the workshops held in Bari, Belfast, Larissa, Paris and Sofia, the youngsters had the chance to:

- explore their own values;
- gain awareness of men, young with disabilities, migrants, LGBT, and young’s body shaming;
- gain the capacity to recognize when aesthetics/cultural differences trigger misunder-

standing, tensions or conflict;

- be empowered through their increasing ability to do research, explore their own perceptions and find out more about other people's attitudes and beliefs;
- become aware of the interpretations, assumptions, and preconceptions they form about others.

This book is useful for youth workers because it can serve to gain vocabulary used by young people; gain a better capacity to discuss concepts of body shaming and self-esteem and acquire the capacity to connect concepts and discussions to everyday professional challenges.

Finally, this book can be transferred to more formal education settings such as schools where teachers can also benefit from the book for raising awareness about body shaming and preventing it.

Chapter 1

Body and fat shame: get rid of a grassophobic society

1.1. Weight stigma: some considerations

“Weight stigma”, also known as “fat phobia” is the prejudice and discrimination against a person based on their weight. It is the idea that a person with a fatter body is not as valuable as a thinner body.

Weight stigma is manifested through negative beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours toward others in relation to their weight and body shapes.

Stigma affects various levels and starts already at a young age, as some research and testimonies collected during our workshops with 18- to 30-year-old show us.

Fat shaming and childhood: in our culture, we learn from an early age to associate body fat with a number of negative characteristics.

In a study by Williams College in Massachusetts, researchers told some stories of a child behaving badly towards a peer at the age of 3 to 5. They then asked other children to indicate on a photo which of them they thought the child might be, and the fat one was singled out as the culprit¹. This experiment may seem far from reality to us, but thanks to the collected testimonies we read about how reality is permeated with these kinds of dynamics “*Classic situation in elementary school where soccer teams had to be formed. Punctually, I and one of my classmates were left last so that the captains had to choose between the “fat guy” and the “midget”.*”²

Parents often unintentionally fuel fat-shaming by criticizing their own or others’ physiques in front of their children.

“I suffered and have suffered body shaming since I was 6 years old, since I realized that I had a body and that my body was for someone “non-compliant.” I can’t think of a single

¹ Cramer P., Steinwert T., *Thin is good, fat is bad: How early does it begin?*, “Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology”, 19 (3) 1998, pp. 429 - 451.

² Anonymous testimonies have been gathered by MOH during workshops and an online survey during the Body Shining project, in Italy 2022.

*incident, I suffer and have suffered **micro-aggressions even in my family**, from health care personnel (doctors who even if you have an ear infection dictate that you have to get tested and lose weight!), from ex-partners...” (female)³*

Preconceptions about weight are widespread, and often stigma tends to affect women more than men.

Fat shaming and marginalized categories: the roots of fat phobia have three main strands: **sexism, homophobia and classism.**

Sexism

Women's bodies have always been at the centre of political debate, and while it has been clear for years now that what we mean by “female beauty” is shaped by the male gaze, we still struggle to understand how a “diet culture” is a tool of control in the hands of patriarchy. Chasing the idea of a perfect body is a way to keep women away from more important and focal issues in political debate. The body seems to be an instrument of what society expects of the women: we must take little space, be quiet and convey delicacy and fragility.

Accepting one's body becomes a threat to patriarchy because it would mean no longer needing the validation of others' gaze.

The constant attention to one's body has negative effects, as we said much more on women than on men. Here are some data:

- a study by the school of Human Resources and Labor at Michigan State University confirms that *women are sixteen times more likely than men to experience weight-related discrimination at work*⁴;
- research at the University of Wisconsin has revealed that body-shaming is *widespread among 13-year-old girls and that more girls than boys feel it at that age*⁵;
- overweight political candidates are penalized for their weight only if they are women⁶;
- fat women are less likely to be in love relationships than their normal-weight peers (while the weight of men is completely irrelevant).⁷

Homophobia & classism

Amy Erdman Farrel author of the book “*Fat shame: the stigma of the fat body*” reconstructs

³ Anonymous testimonies have been gathered by MOH during workshops and an online survey during the Body Shining project, in Italy 2022.

⁴ <https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2007/msu-led-study-women-face-workplace-weight-discrimination> - Consulted in May 2022

⁵ Gabe S., Hyde J.S., Lindberg S.M., *Body objectification and depression in adolescents: The role of gender, shame, and rumination* “Psychology of Women Quarterly” 31(2), June 2007, pp. 164 - 175.

⁶ Renee Engeln, *Beauty mania. Quando la bellezza diventa ossessione*. Harper Collins, pp. 120 - 148.

⁷ *Ibidem*

how fatness went from being a concept linked to a sense of prosperity, well-being and wealth to a lack of self-control of balance and morality. As is often the case in this dichotomous society, where to define ourselves we move from denigrating the other, fatness was used to define “other” than what is considered the human standard, attributed to the lowest social classes considered inferior, while thinness became a symbol of moral superiority.

Puritanism and white supremacy, classism and racism in America and the contemporary West are what led to the belief that the fat body was inferior. As we will see later, if we can challenge these beliefs today, we owe it to fat, lesbian, queer, black, and disabled activists who have fought against the value system that wants the white, able-bodied body at its summit⁸.

1.2. Fat shaming and Health

If you’ve been a fat person since childhood, you’ve probably heard phrases like “if you don’t want to do it for yourself, do it for your health” or “have you ever tried dieting?”. Being fat means, in the common view of our society, being lazy, greedy, awkward, clump, or inept.

“The most recent episode of body shaming, and also the most painful one, happened to me a year ago: I went to a nutritionist to lose weight. During one of the first checkups, not having lost much weight, the doctor looked at me and asked, ‘come on tell me the truth, you’re not following the diet, you’re lying to me.’ Lo and behold, the fact that I had not lost weight was in no way attributable to her inadequate diet but to my alleged lack of willpower.” (female).

There’s a misleading and very ingrained narrative within us, so it’s hard to get out of it, and you have to make an effort. First, fat people have always existed, there is a variability of bodies and body shapes, and the number of people with fat bodies has increased because society has changed.

The wrong narrative is to view fatness as “a choice.” People with fat bodies are considered people with a moral defect, people who could have chosen differently. This is actually not the case; you can influence your body, but it is not so automatic. We have to consider that many of the causes are external to individuals, and even internal causes are not always modifiable by people.

Fat bodies existed well before the emergence of the concern for the health of fat people, this concern in fact arose from the intersection of the market with aesthetic models.

⁸ Renee Engeln, *Beauty mania. Quando la bellezza diventa ossessione*. Harper Collins, 2018.

⁹ Anonymous testimonies have been gathered by MOH during workshops and an online survey during the Body Shining project, in Italy 2022.

Society has imposed on us the desire not to be fat, and when it comes to a need, that means matching a supply-demand in the consumer society. Hence, the culture of dieting, fitness programs, and slimming products¹⁰.

1.3. Fat shaming and Diet Culture

According to the book “**The Atlas of Women**”, the profits from diet and weight loss products are impossible to measure with certainty, but the turnover is many billions. In the United Kingdom, for example, almost two-thirds of people are on a diet for “almost all their lives”, in the United States about 45 million Americans spend 33 billion dollars on products to lose weight¹¹.

In recent years, the idea of female beauty has changed somewhat, but the constant thinness persists.

“Diet culture” refers to a set of beliefs that values thinness, appearance, and shape above health & well-being. Additionally, the concept places importance on restricting calories, normalizing negative self-talk, and labelling certain foods as “good” and “bad”. Individuals subjected to “diet culture” messages have been conditioned to believe that not only does thinness and dieting equate to health, but that the pursuit of health makes one person morally superior to another¹².

In the dynamics of diet culture, we encounter the paradox whereby it is clear that health has very little to do with being thin. To this day, in fact, it is possible to find diets in newspapers, magazines, online, and on phone apps. Very often these diets are totally arbitrary and not followed by a doctor. How then can we talk about health? When we talk about health, we have to ask what it is, because the diet does not act so immediately on health.

Health, as defined by the World Health Organization, is a complete state of physical psychological social and spiritual well-being: we will now see how the act of shaming someone for their body does not contribute to the achievement of health.

1.4. The effect of shame

“On a day at the beach, my friends and I were near a group of girls. At some point, they

¹⁰ Seager Joni, *L’atlante delle donne*. Torino, add editore (2021). p. 81.

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oe2b6s0e924&t=375s>

¹² <https://recreation.ucsd.edu/2021/01/diet-culture-social-media/>

began to see the moment I removed my sarong, there and then I had not paid any attention, but they continued to see more intensely, so I began to realize that there was something about my body that was wrong. Falling into total despondency, I hurriedly got dressed”¹³.

If I am not the person I would like to be, shame could, theoretically, make me more aware and push me to change my attitude. But the process of body shaming goes through three key concepts:

- the ideal of beauty is unattainable;
- it is not women who fail, but the system;
- women who are body shamed are not moving closer to the beauty ideal but away from it.

In none of the research on obesity has it been shown that shaming someone about their body leads to weight loss; in fact, the opposite has been shown.

The consequences of body shaming can be very serious: first and foremost, as already pointed out, shame about one’s body, which is an emotional state that can be very painful; the inability to achieve the desired physical appearance can have negative effects on mood, can result in a significant increase in anxiety and insecurity; and dissatisfaction with one’s body can lead to isolation or the engaging in harmful behaviours (such as excessive exercise or dietary restrictions, even to the point of orthorexia) in order to change one’s appearance. Among the consequences of which such behaviour can lead are bulimia, anorexia, depression, and in extreme cases suicide¹⁴.

1.5. Fat acceptance movement

Until the end of the 19th century, fatness was a privilege for the few, so corpulence meant wealth, and affluence (representing greed and avarice in the most extreme cases). However, there was a contradiction in society that also concerned the spectacularization of fatness operated mainly by fashion magazines, newspapers and the media in general. Extremely fat people were considered “grotesque” and “ridiculous”.

The cultural change went hand in hand with the socio-economic change in the 19th century: the rise of the bourgeoisie meant that more people were able to obtain sufficient wealth and do sedentary work. Bodies begin to change, less physical effort, easier to maintain a high weight.

Food production also began to change. Ironically, it was at this time - when being fat was not-

¹³ Anonymous testimonies have been gathered by MOH during workshops and an online survey during the Body Shaming project, in Italy 2022.

¹⁴ https://www.sinapsi.unina.it/vergognadise_bullismoomofobico - Consulted in May 2022

the 'privilege' of the rich - that fatness began to be seen as a cultural problem¹⁵.

As society changed, bodies also began to change, and with the link between aesthetics and capitalism, the idea began to emerge that people with fat bodies chose to have them and that they lacked them, therefore, willpower.

People whose bodies do not correspond to the 'ideal' canon are insulted or discriminated against - one-third of people in Europe have already experienced this. In most cases, being a victim of body shaming is not an isolated case: among Europeans who have experienced discrimination, 36% of the people have been discriminated against more than ten times¹⁶. Shame is not a health-enhancing act but a clumsy and self-righteous attempt to undermine the self-esteem of others.

Fat acceptance movement

Fat activism emerged as a social movement in the late 1960s, at the same cultural moment as the homosexual liberation movement, the second wave of feminism, the social rights movement, the student movements and black power.

In her book, '*Beauty Mania*', Renee Engeln states that body shaming has major effects on the emotional well-being and mental health of women and girls, mainly because it triggers a feeling of shame¹⁷.

Fat acceptance is the movement that led feminism to the concept that all bodies are valid. The aim of the movement was to achieve a society in which no one could feel discriminated against because of their body¹⁸.

Some of the initial manifestations have gone down in history, such as the "fat-in" in Central Park in New York, where almost 500 people gathered, eating sweets and burning diet books, and in 1967 the "National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance" was founded, an organisation that wanted to educate and make people aware of what it meant to be fat in society¹⁹.

First wave

During the early part of the 20th century, the first wave of activities consisted of isolated activists drawing attention to the dominant model of obesity and challenging it as only one of several possible models.

¹⁵ Amy Erdman Farrell, "*Fat Shame, Lo stigma del corpo Grasso*", Tlon, 2020, pp. 63 - 127.

¹⁶ <https://it.yougov.com/news/2019/10/10/body-shaming-once-victim-always-victim/> - Consulted in May 2022

¹⁷ Renee Engeln, *Beauty mania. Quando la bellezza diventa ossessione*. Harper Collins, 2018, p. 130.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*

¹⁹ <https://thepasswordunito.com/2019/12/03/corpi-dissidenti-body-positivity-e-fat-acceptance/> - Consulted in May 2022

Second wave

In the second wave, the fat acceptance movement became more widespread in the US and started to spread to other countries. Ideas from the movement began to appear in the mainstream. Publishers became more willing to publish fat acceptance themed literature.

By the 1990s, input from the fat acceptance movement began to be incorporated into research papers by some members of the medical profession such as new anti-dieting programs and models of obesity management.

Third-wave

The fat acceptance movement has seen a diversification of projects during the third wave. Activities have addressed issues of both fat and race, class, sexuality, and other issues. Size discrimination has been increasingly addressed in the arts, as well.

The goals of the movement (considering the three waves) include:

- break down aesthetic standards;
- highlighting the connections between discrimination against body fat and other forms of marginalization;
- promote new research on the link between obesity and health;
- counteracting beauty companies;
- liberating all bodies from oppression and domination.

Conclusion

With the idea of a “conforming” and “civilized” body, the denigration of fat people joins and exacerbates sexism, classism, homophobia and all the other means by which our society classifies and oppresses people based on bodily attributes. It would be best to start by shedding this cultural baggage that has fueled a hateful perspective and embracing the idea that our bodies are valid.

Workshop held in Bari, Italy



Testimonies

collected in Italy



TESTIMONY #1

In middle school I was told I was fat by two of my classmates, during class, in front of everyone and in front of the teacher, who did nothing.

TESTIMONY #2

I have suffered and am suffering body shaming since I was 6 years old, since I realised I had a body and that my body was 'non-compliant' for someone. I can't think of a single episode, I also suffer and have suffered micro-aggressions in my family, from health personnel (doctors who even if you have an ear infection force you to take tests and lose weight!), from ex-partners...

TESTIMONY #3

I am a straight, thin white woman, therefore with a body considered compliant by this society. Compliant yes, but...

Usually body shaming has involved teasing from relatives or close friends. In the case of family members, for having a 'too' prominent nose, particularly from my brother. For many years I considered my face ugly because of my nose and always wanted an invisible nose. Today I wouldn't change it for anything in the world. For my body, on the other hand, I was teased by friends, especially close friends. They would point out that I had no shape (I was always very thin). At the age of 13, I then started to grow and from one day to the next I found myself with large breasts that stood out against my slim physique. Some friends used to say that I had 'saggy

tits', a complex that I carried with me until a few years ago and perhaps never really got over, even though I had decided not to use a bikini top for years. Everything was done as a joke and I pretended not to be offended so as not to be touchy.

TESTIMONY #4

Ever since I was in primary school, I was always the tallest one in the class. At first, I liked it, but in the long run, it almost became a problem for me. For a girl I was 'too tall'. So I grew up with this little trauma of height. Every time I was in a group, I had to be last in line, in the pictures, always at the back. Even some guys I went out with even told me 'don't wear heels when we go out' - 'wear flats when we see each other'. To this day the first comment I get is 'ah, how tall you are! Your boyfriend must be really tall!'. Now, I don't care if I'm almost 2m in heels. If I feel like it, I put them on and even if I hear 'judgmental' looks or comments, I'm aware enough to get over it and not give a damn.

TESTIMONY #5

An orthopaedic surgeon told me that I would have to wear a back brace to correct my scoliosis because with an asymmetric breast my husband would not want to have sex with me.

TESTIMONY #6

In high school, those who were technically my 'friends' mocked my moles on my face, said I was too pale by forcing me to wear make-up, made fun of my curly hair, made fun of me for often wearing the same clothes alluding to the fact that I didn't wash them, always everything in class. I was also nega-

tively perceived when I wore braces on my teeth.

TESTIMONY #7

At school, classmates but also some professors always affirmed and emphasized my always being quite thin. The saddest thing was that I was often asked why and even if I was anorexic, which of course I am not and never have been. It also often happened to me during medical examinations of various kinds that my thinness was emphasized. I remember two statements in particular that annoyed me a lot because they were inappropriate and to which I could not give a valid answer each time: 'HOW CAN YOU BE SO THIN? DO YOU EAT?'

It wasn't until I was 17 that I realised two things:

- 1) that body shaming is also this, that is, the fact that you have to feel uncomfortable about your natural thinness
- 2) to this day I no longer pay so much attention to these phrases and simply reply that I have always been like this

TESTIMONY #8

At a sporting event I was taking off my heavy clothes to stay only in the tracksuit I had on underneath for sporting activity, and a classmate apostrophised me with a sound of disgust towards my body.

TESTIMONY #9

"What is the secret of your eternal youth?"

TESTIMONY #10

I received body shaming from strangers. In particular, I remember an episode when I was playing volleyball as a young girl, I was

about 12 years old and on my way back to the locker room after the game, a big guy from the audience stopped me and pointed out that I was 'really petite'. I was really hurt at that age, but I still managed to tell him to fuck off. I realise that mine is a very small contribution and that I was fortunate not to have been subjected to anything heavier than what I have recounted.

TESTIMONY #11

The phrase from which the Odyssey of Anorexia was born: 'look at you, thinner, you're a different person'.

TESTIMONY #12

When my breasts started to develop in eighth grade I tried to hide them because that also caused whispers.

TESTIMONY #13

"Such wide hips"

TESTIMONY #14

I hadn't seen my group of friends for quite a while, due to the pandemic. After the customary greetings and the various 'how nice to see you again!', one of my friends starts off with: 'you look well put together, you eat everything for lunch, don't you?' I react with an embarrassed laugh and he, noticing my embarrassment, adds 'but no, just kidding, you're just a bit fatter'.

TESTIMONY #15

"You have a nice face, though!"

TESTIMONY #16

"With those ankles, you'll never be able to wear ballet flats."

TESTIMONY #17

I receive some trousers from one of my relatives, but they are too tight. She comments 'don't worry, when you lose weight they will fit'. Spoiler: I don't want to lose weight

TESTIMONY #18

"Meh, and get a little tan."

TESTIMONY #19

On a day at the beach, my friends and I were near a group of girls. At some point, they started to see the moment I took off my sarong, there and then I did not pay attention, but they continued to see more intensely so I started to realise that there was something wrong with my body. Falling into total despondency, I hurriedly got dressed.

TESTIMONY #20

Classic situation in primary school when football teams had to be formed. Punctually, one of my classmates and I were last, so the captains had to choose between the 'fat' and the 'dwarf'.

TESTIMONY #21

My mother, grandmother and aunt refer to the size of my breasts, breasts as a symbol of femininity in my body. A few years ago I was much more petite and almost lacking the shape that is canonically attached to a woman.

TESTIMONY #22

"I've seen you bloated lately, try to do more physical activity and eat better."

TESTIMONY #23

'With your hair up, you look much prettier'

TESTIMONY #24

"Are you going to the beach? You look like a mozzarella!"

TESTIMONY #25

"Are you eating? You're too skinny, you look wasted."

TESTIMONY #26

I remember when we used to have family lunches or dinners, at Christmas time, and my uncles would comment on how much I had put on weight over the past year. They wouldn't just comment on that, they would also comment on the amount of food I ingested during the whole meal. They did it in a joking way, but for a teenager, it was not nice to hear such phrases.

TESTIMONY #27

I am almost 1,8 m tall, which is slightly 'out of the norm' for a woman. Especially when I was in high school, the first thing I was asked by older people, and therefore not peers, was "but do you play basketball/volleyball? With that height, you should!" Why should I play a specific sport, just because I'm taller than the norm?

TESTIMONY #28

I have Nordic origins, so I have slightly lighter skin than the norm, especially here in southern Italy. When I was younger, whenever summer came, I was afraid to uncover my legs, because I often received comments like: "oh, but you reflect the light!" - "how white you are!" - "do you want to get some sun now and then?"

TESTIMONY #29

Ever since I was a teenager I have always been a bit overweight, so a few years ago, when I was 23, I decided to go on a diet and lose weight because I no longer felt comfortable in my body, perhaps also because of the unkind comments I was receiving. Since then, sometimes from the same people, I get comments like “oh, stop losing weight!” - “you’re too skinny now!” - “your bones are showing!”

TESTIMONY #30

I don’t have a specific memory now, but I definitely remember that when I was a child, any little comment about my own body, received from others, seemed like a huge thing to ‘put up with’. I received a comment about my nose being slightly longer than the average, and I remember that by the time I was 15, I was already talking to my grandmother about wanting to have a nose job. Fortunately, I realized later that it was nonsense and that my nose is beautiful the way it is.

TESTIMONY #31

I have always been chubby. That is my problem. Combined with the fact that I have always been good at school, the combo is a disaster. Those I considered my classmates have called me all sorts of names: pig, lard, pork, etc. I suffered a lot because of this and still don’t like myself. Everyone knew but no one ever did anything about it, not even the school psychologist who knew all about it.

TESTIMONY #32

My thighs are identical to those of an elephant. I think I have elephantiasis. I have done a thousand diets, and a thousand types of massage but the problem is always there.

Maybe it gets better but it’s always there. My grandfather used to say to me: <hey, have you lost weight?> and that was when I had obviously gained weight. So to emphasize, precisely, that I was fatter.

TESTIMONY #33

High school, junior high, reformatory-like school. To this day I wonder what I was doing there. I just wanted to study. I always loved studying but we all know that geeks don’t have it easy. I had to compete with low-class but beautiful girls and I was the exact opposite. They played a thousand tricks on me: cut my hair, locked me in the gym, posed as a hypothetical suitor, and that’s when I realized I either allied myself or succumbed. I bargained for my freedom: I passed on homework in exchange for protection. Would I do it again? Yes. A thousand, a hundred more times. Those who do not suffer cannot understand.

TESTIMONY #34

I only went to the gym to lose weight. Let’s face it, who goes because they like to get tired? Well. After I’ve made up my mind, paid, and bought all the cute and matching track-suits. I arrive at the gym. Fatigued and hot 2-metre studs looking at me and laughing. Banter, smirks, grins. I decide to ignore it. I go to the hall. There’s the class waiting for me. I start the choreography. And 1, and 2, and 3... and between jumping and bending, I lose my rhythm. The teacher humiliates me in front of everyone by telling me that my mistake was blocking the choreography. I don’t go for it, I take my towel and leave. I never set foot in a gym again.

TESTIMONY #35

In my previous job to identify me, colleagues, when I was not present, would say: <she is the big girl with the wide skirts>. No one was ever shocked by such a description. When I heard that, I pointed out that I had a first and last name and that my being large could not be a sign of recognition.

TESTIMONY #36

I was born in a remote village in the province of Taranto and I was always big and very intelligent. I was introverted and this did not help me. My classmates in the small town always bullied, mocked and teased me. I went so far as to never leave home because I preferred to read my books and build my own world in peace. No one ever helped me but I decided to leave my native town to study but also to escape from this small reality.

TESTIMONY #37

I have suffered body shaming in my family for as long as I can remember. I was never 'thin enough' and when I lost weight I was 'too thin'. I think experiences like that are detrimental to the people who suffer them because as long as you are in that system of ideas you don't realize that you have done anything wrong and you feel a sense of shame coming from outside.

TESTIMONY #38

I have been a victim for years and always at school. Victim of words, insults, offences. People who made fun of me because of my weight. Of course, these people were not alone, but they had the backs of the other classmates who made them feel strong, good and acclaimed. One teacher in particular,

in high school, also started to make me feel guilty about this teasing, to make me feel wrong and that I somehow deserved it.

TESTIMONY #39

I was always overweight until the age of 15. I went on an initial diet but since then I have gained weight and lost weight often. I have been subjected to body shaming at school, at university, and at home by my family. Sometimes heavy and discriminatory, other times with comments for 'my own good' and my 'health'. I think that no one should comment on other people's bodies, that our society is deeply fatphobic and that we need to talk about these things in order to counteract them.

TESTIMONY #40

I suffer body shaming constantly, but in the last few years at university, I have managed to move on and realize that indeed my relationship with my body must be my own, and not that of others. It was often my family who tended to emphasize physical flaws. And it is in the family that one is often brought up to think that a body must necessarily have certain measurements to be beautiful. In my opinion, one of the first problems is precisely this miseducating about what the perfect body is and what the perfect example of beauty is, according to influences from advertising, social media, and show business. Things that are conveyed to us indirectly or even behaviour from family members. In our society, the model of the perfect body is also imposed on us by fashion brands, which fortunately are now somewhat improving on this aspect, while the idea of the perfect body should be that of a healthy body.

Chapter 2

The political body: who owns our body?

About body shaming, gender and race

By targeting our bodies and appearances, *body shaming* addresses an important aspect of our identities: gender. Being a woman, a man, is an identity constructed by our education that gives us a place in society and dictates what roles and behaviours we should have, what activities are made for us and even what we should look like. We were taught that girls wear skirts and boys play soccer, etc. This gender identity is based on the observation of biological differences between bodies: according to our genitalia (penis or vulva), and secondary sexual characteristics (hair, chest, etc.) and we add to it different social norms we have to follow if we are a “man” or a “woman”. These norms are constructed: we are not born loving pink if we are a girl or enjoying blue if we are a boy, but our entourage (parents, relatives, school) accustoms us to love and wear a certain colour. We have therefore transmitted these norms that influence the way we imagine what is a beautiful, good and valid body, according to our cultural context. However, in practice, not everyone fits these norms and even most of us experience judgments and discrimination because we don’t fully fit into these rigid expectations. This is why we cannot talk about body shaming without talking about gender identity.

2.1. Women, men and Body Shaming

What is Body Shaming for men, for women?

From the moment we are born, a range of institutions (medical, legal, moral) observe our bodies and categorize us as “girl” or “boy”, thus dictating the norms that we must follow in society. These norms also concern our appearance, and we learn what male and female bodies should look like. These appearances are called gender expressions: it is our appearance (clothes, haircut, hair, musculature, make-up, attitudes) that shows that we are a girl or a boy in society (“I wear my hair short and build up my shoulders because I am a man” etc.) and it is by corresponding to these norms that we will be recognized by others in our gender. On the one hand, our body “will have” to develop in a certain way at puberty to become a male body (tall, muscular, with hair especially on the face etc.) or a female body (chest, hip etc.). On the other hand, our appearance will have to follow precise criteria of beauty: to wax, to make up, to have breasts of such shape when we are a woman; to be muscular, to be at least taller than the girls when we are a man etc. But these norms are made of stereotypes that do not necessarily

correspond to the reality of the bodies and the desires of each one. Not fitting into the norms, not being “masculine” or “feminine” enough, becomes a subject of body shaming: “*When I was in 6th grade, I never wore skirts, I didn’t wear make-up, no handbags. I always had very little shape (no breasts, no ass). As a result, I was harassed, with remarks about how I looked like a skeleton, that I was ugly, that I wasn’t a girl...*”[#] - (Female, age 21) . These gender stereotypes and expectations about physical appearance influence the way we look at ourselves, at others and therefore our interactions: “*I’m 1.69 meters tall, which doesn’t seem to appeal to women. Being on Tinder, I chat with a number of girls. The conversation is pretty good, but they often ask me how tall I am. I tell the truth, they tell me I’m ‘too short.’*” - (Male, age 23). Children and adolescents thus learn what their bodies “should” look like and follow the norms, sometimes without even realizing it. This makes it even more difficult to fight against the unrealistic images that are imposed on them on a daily basis.

The consequences of Body Shaming as a type of gender discrimination

In our societies, appearance has an important place, especially in the media (advertisements, social networks, etc.) which broadcast images of “perfect” bodies. These images are often taken from the point of view of the male gaze: a way of filming, photographing, showing women’s bodies as objects (which we find in the hypersexualization and the fragmentation of women’s bodies²⁰) rather than subjects. This view is so common that it appears to be neutral and universal, which we adopt and which guides our ways of seeing the world, of desiring and seeing the bodies of others and our own. Teenagers are even more likely to follow these norms and denigrate bodies that don’t fit them, because, during puberty, young people are very vulnerable to changes in their bodies. Body shaming has effects on the construction of self-image and self-confidence. Studies show that “ Women and men experience the negative pressure of ideal body image in different ways. Men and women share body image risk factors and the consequences of negative body image, but women tend to be affected more severely”²¹ and in greater proportions, reinforcing gender inequalities.

Getting out of the expectations: what consequences?

Body shaming occurs when our body does not naturally correspond to the norms without us being able to change it (natural pilosity, size etc.), but it is also present when we choose or when we seem to choose not to comply with these norms that we do not like. We can then become the target of body shaming and rejection if we refuse to “correct” our body or to behave “correctly”, as this woman (24 years old) testifies: “*I was 13 years old, being brunette I have*

²⁰ Laura Mulvey, « Plaisir visuel et cinéma narratif », *Screen*, 1975. ; “Hypersexualisation du corps des femmes”, *FeministShould*, [URL](#). Male gaze in particular considers the female body by breaking it down into body parts (breasts, hips, mouth, hair, etc.) instead of seeing the female body as a whole.

²¹ Audrey Nelson, “Body Shaming Is a Problem for Both Men and Women”, *Psychology Today*, 2021, [URL](#). Plus ici : *AsapSCIENCE*, “*The Science of Body Image*”, *YouTube*, 2019, [URL](#); *Allure*, “Girls Ages 6–18 Talk About Body Image”, *YouTube*, 2018, [URL](#)

black hair. One day, two of my friends asked me if I shaved. In high school, I had put on shorts and I heard the following sentence: “When you put on shorts, you shave”. I hid my body a lot, especially my legs and armpits so that no one would see that I had any hair.” Moreover, a lot of queer²² teenagers are being body shamed for the simple fact that their gender expression does not fit into the binary and heterosexual norm (cisgender woman-man).

Like other forms of discrimination, Body Shaming has serious psychological consequences and applies in our intimate, daily, and even professional spheres: for example, a more feminine woman will be more easily hired for a job as a receptionist than one who would be considered “sloppy”. At 16, I wanted to be a fireman, I was looked at sideways and I was not believed capable of it: I was “frail”, “fragile”, “too feminine”. And I get looked at the wrong way when I say I’m a boxer, military, former firefighter.” - (Female, age 20). It is then necessary to fight constantly to seize certain opportunities in spite of the prejudices.

2.2. Body Shaming and gender minorities

So far we have talked about “women” and “men”, but there are other gender identities²³ called “gender minorities” that go beyond the binary norm by identifying themselves differently: non-binary, intersex, transgender, gender fluid people²⁴, etc. They are affected by specific forms of body shaming.

The vulnerability of transgender and non-binary people towards body and gender norms

Transgender people do not identify with the gender they have been assigned when they were born, while non-binary people do not strictly adhere to a “male” or “female” identity. *Gender dysphoria* is the difficulty of feeling like you belong to a gender that is different from the one assigned to you by those around you and by society. The discomfort can be such that some people start a transition to modify their bodies and be perceived physically by the gender they identify with (this is the *passing*²⁵): “I started my hormonal transition a year ago. I’m pretty satisfied because, for the first time in my life, I actually feel like I like what I’m looking at in the mirror.” - Kellysha, a trans woman. Yet, coming out of imposed gender norms and beginning the transition path can put people in a very vulnerable position when faced with body shaming.

²² Queer: community of people whose gender identity or sexual orientation does not correspond to the cisgender and heterosexual norm. see referencies in the bibliography.

²³ Gender identity is the sense of belonging to a gender, which may be different from the gender assigned at birth. There are as many gender identities as there are people on the planet.

²⁴ See the resources on the lexicon of gender identities offered in the bibliography.

²⁵ Amy E. Green & all., “Association of Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy With Depression, Thoughts of Suicide, and Attempted Suicide Among Transgender and Nonbinary Youth”, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, déc. 2021 (Résumé français par XY Media : [URL](#))

Specific discrimination : transphobia and transmisogyny

Transgender people face discrimination directly related to the way their bodies look and feel about their gender identity (transphobia). They are expected to match their bodies to their claimed gender identity by “correctly” following gender beauty standards, often in a strict and exaggerated manner. For example, trans women are forced to follow precisely the “feminine” beauty standards and stigmatized if they have a deep voice, beard, no breasts, etc. They must “look like a real woman” to fit the norm. However, at the same time, they are reproached for reproducing and reinforcing the stereotypes of “femininity” or “masculinity” by doing too much. They are subjected to these double injunctions, to body shaming and violence on a daily basis, which sometimes prevents them from accessing health care: because the discrimination is too high, some prefer to avoid medical environments rather than being mistreated²⁶.

Relationship to the body and sexuality: a challenge for all

During sexual relations, we show our body to other people. One must therefore feel comfortable with one’s naked appearance and that of one’s genitals, but also with the image of one’s body in certain positions or the expression of one’s face while taking pleasure, etc. Thus, the media and mainstream pornography influence what is seen as “normal” in our intimate sphere. During sex, people often think more about what their partner sees of them rather than enjoying themselves and prevent themselves from following their desires²⁷ for fear of what they look like. Studies show that heterosexual women are particularly victims of body shaming and are even more so when it comes to sexuality. The same problems can arise in other sexualities, which also have their specificities in terms of discrimination: homosexual men suffer more from beauty standards than homosexual women²⁸; transgender people are often reduced to their genitals etc. as Kellysha testifies: *“As a black trans woman, there is a lot of fetishism around our identities. People are more obsessed with our transition than with ourselves. Quite often when I tell a man that I am a trans woman or he suspects it, the first questions will always be about my genitals: whether I have a penis or a vagina. There, you realize that a stranger has no problem asking you what your gender looks like.”*

2.3. Gender, Race, Body Shaming: When Discriminations Intersect²⁹

We cannot talk about gender and body shaming without talking about another aspect of our appearances: race is also a social construction (there is no biological race!) that categorizes and hierarchizes humans according to their origins, skin colour, etc. In our European societies,

²⁶ In France, 35% of trans people have already given up medical care because of transphobia from caregivers - Chrysalis.

²⁷ Here, we do not make judgments and we talk about the consequences of unrealistic expectations on the development of each person.

²⁸ More here: Mental Health Foundation, “Body image, sexual orientation and gender identity”, [mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk), 6 août 2020, [URL](#).

²⁹ Concept of intersectionality theorized by African-American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw.

racialized people (Blacks, Asians, North Africans, etc.) are subjected to specific forms of body shaming.

Racism and *body shaming* (Race and racism)

Racism, i.e., discrimination related to a person's ethnic origins, is usually based directly on appearance and the stereotypes associated with it: *"It started in middle school where some kids criticized my appearance by calling me 'Tching tchong' or 'fat pig', punctuated by 'you disgust me'. In high school, not to mention ordinary racism, I was called a noich or a chink (in a friendly way) even though I am Vietnamese..."* - Female. Black people will be attacked more on facial features, frizzy hair or skin colour deemed "too dark". This view of black bodies stems from the history of colonization and slavery,³⁰ as it has helped justify the devaluation and exploitation of racialized people. While the traits targeted change according to race, what these prejudices have in common is the arbitrary valorization of a white Caucasian norm. These representations persist and still affect young people: *"I went to a college where having curly hair was frowned upon. You were referred to the fact that you were of mixed race, to the fact that you were of this or that origin and what that should look like. There was the "you are mixed race so you must have this type of character, you must be athletic, you must be thin with a bulging thigh..."*. And above all you choose how mixed-race you're going to be: either you straighten your hair or you had to wear braids altogether." – Tiphaine, female (in *Dear Body*).

Mixing gender and race: a very specific body shaming (intersectionality)

Discrimination intertwined with each other creates new forms of discrimination. When a person is a victim of sexism and racism, body shaming takes on a new form that is not the same as gender-based or race-based shaming. *"All my life, I was told that beauty, femininity, softness, grace were the embodiment of a white European woman, that black women were a million miles away from that."* - says a black woman (22 years). The sexist injunctions of beauty and femininity are specific to black women who face racism at the same time. This discrimination, also called *misogynoir*, can also be reinforced by the stereotype of the "strong black woman" and by this very fact does not recognize the suffering and trauma caused by such injunctions. It is therefore important to take into account the identity specificities of victims of body shaming to better understand the mechanisms.

Essentialize and dehumanize the other

Our society is built on the stigmatization of certain bodies (legacies of slavery, colonization, human zoos, etc.) which still extends today in the perception and expectations projected on racialized bodies. In particular, young racialized people report remarks that associate them with a "natural", excessive, or even "wild" sexuality. This phenomenon affects racialized men

³⁰ Example : Histoire des coupes afro, voir Gordien, A. "La coupe afro : une simple histoire de cheveux ?", *La Vie des idées*, 2019, [URL](#).

as exemplified by Kellysha’s testimony prior to her transition: “As a black man, I experienced a lot of fetishism from the white gay community. I had comments about my genitals being supposedly ‘big.’ I was told, “Black men are not allowed to be anything other than a sex object that is there to satisfy”. Regarding black women, a stronger, more masculine, very agentic energy is projected into their sexuality³¹. Tiphaine says, “They had elected the best-looking booty in the class. The most beautiful was a dark-skinned Caribbean girl and the second one was me. The reason was: “she is black so she has a black butt and you are mixed race so you have a half black butt”. I thought to myself: “ah but that’s supposed to be a compliment. And does that mean that when it comes to my butt, I’m not as good as a black girl but better than a white girl?” (in *Dear Body*). Women from North Africa, for example, are assigned to the stereotypes of the hypersexualized “ beurette ” (i.e. female beur), the “ racaille ” (i.e. scum) or the veiled woman³² (French context). Racialized bodies are also sexualized and fetishized because they seem “exotic” compared to white bodies. This may seem “positive” but it is still racist: the person is not taken into account for herself, but what she represents is essentialized and eroticized according to her ethnicity. Asian women are associated with a frail, youthful physique and traits of docility and passivity, as if they were people who could be sexually compromised. Many examples demonstrate the violence projected on social minorities’ bodies.

Conclusion

Take back control of these standards, expectations and reinvent them

All these examples allow us to perceive the violence applied to our bodies on a daily basis and this from a very young age. Adolescents and young adults - because their bodies are changing and they are building their identity - are all the more subject to this kind of judgment, criticism and discrimination of body shaming, which can have heavy consequences on their physical and mental health. Gender and race are not the only dimensions of body shaming, but they cover a sensitive area in intercultural contexts, so it is important to pay attention to them in order to understand its mechanisms and to deal with them in the most specific way possible.

³¹ Claire-Marine Beha, “Racisme sexuel : des stéréotypes lourds de conséquences pour les femmes”, *Gazette des femmes*, 2022, [URL](#)

³² C. Cambreling, G. Erner, Podcast “Beurettes” : du fantasme orientaliste au cliché raciste. Avec Salima Tenfiche et Christelle Taraud”, *France Culture*, 2021, [URL](#).

Bibliography to go further

Gender identities: glossary

National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center, *LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms for Health Care Teams*, 2020, [URL](#).

KILLERMAN Sam, “Comprehensive* List of LGBTQ+ Vocabulary Definitions”, [URL](#).

Representation and racial fetishization of bodies:

HOOKS Bell, “Selling hot pussy: representations of black female sexuality in the cultural marketplace”, in HOOKS Bell, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Toronto, ON, Canada: Between the Lines, 1992, [URL](#). : La représentation des corps des femmes noires dans la culture populaire, liens avec l’histoire de l’esclavage et des stéréotypes qui en découlent.

KUHN Annette, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Books, 1985.

JUILLARD Amit, “Je ne suis pas raciste, j’ai un amant noir”, *Le Temps*, août 2020, [URL](#).

ARLANDIS Fanny, “Repenser la fétichisation de la femme asiatique”, *Slate*, 2017, [URL](#).

BEHA Claire-Marine, “Racisme sexuel : des stéréotypes lourds de conséquences pour les femmes”, *Gazette des femmes*, Février 2022, [URL](#).

WONG Kristina, “I Give Up On Trying To Explain Why The Fetishization Of Asian Women Is Bad”, *Huffpost*, 2018, [URL](#).

SMERALDA Juliette, *Peau noire, cheveu crépu. L’histoire d’une aliénation*, Editions Jasor, 2005.

Interviews:

Lejitim, “Kellysha, Lettres à nos petites soeurs #3”, *YouTube*, [URL](#).

BORDIER Léa, “Cher Corps - Tiphaine”, *YouTube*, [URL](#).

Workshop held in Paris, France



Testimonies

collected in France



TESTIMONY #1

I was in 5th grade at Victor Hugo College in the 3rd arrondissement of Paris, we were in sports class. I had had precocious puberty, and therefore quite large breasts at a very young age (D / DD). So we were in sports class, and a boy passed by me and said “Be careful, it’s falling”, here it was already a big complex for me but it became even more so after this reflection. *(Woman - 18yo)*

TESTIMONY #2

I am a rather “fat” man, I have well-marked shapes and huge stretch marks on my stomach and all over my body. It happens to me that when I sleep with someone or when I send nudes they make fun of me or that they don’t want to sleep with me because of it. *(Trans Man - 16yo)*

TESTIMONY #3

In high school by classmates who called me fat. During a lesson on soap, they said “we just have to put some on [my first name] so that it will be less greasy”. Many remarked on the fact that I was bigger than them (I was then between 70 and 75 kg for 1m71). Also remarks that I’m ugly. I also had an accident while in college that kept me from walking properly for a few years (using a crutch and limping), got me the nickname “Doctor House” for 1 year in middle School. Today I no longer have a disability but I am still overweight. To this day I have no self-confidence. *(Woman - 25yo)*

TESTIMONY #4

Small, in classical dance, hairiness comes with puberty, we tell all young girls that you have to shave to be beautiful, that it’s disgusting on stage

At 15, the mother of my ex-boyfriend was overweight, so she took revenge on me because I was very thin and I personally wanted to gain weight, she was constantly thinking about our respective weights.

16 years old: I want to be a firefighter, they look at me askance and they don’t think I can do it, I’m “frail”, “fragile”, “too feminine” And then generally, people look at me askance when I say that I am a boxer, a soldier, a former firefighter. *(Woman - 20yo)*

TESTIMONY #5

Disparaging remark from college because I have too much weight. The final blow was when my mother told me that I was wasting away because I gained weight. *(Woman - 22yo)*

TESTIMONY #6

Remarks in primary school by classmates: “Do your parents give you food?” And skin color: “your family is monkeys” Then this year my aunt in front of my parents: “Are you sure you’re eating enough? You’re very skinny”. *(Woman - 21yo)*

TESTIMONY #7

I think I have a lot of thoughts about size on a daily basis and especially in romantic relationships. Unfortunately, I owe this growth defect to a disease that is almost not visible but is present. The latest and most explicit example is when I had a date, to whom my size was a problem. I tried to make him

understand that it was a disease, which he replied with “ah yes you surprise me that your small size is a handicap”. He didn’t want to understand that I “possessed” a handicap and only referred to my size as a crippling penalty. (*Man - 21yo*)

TESTIMONY #8

Body shaming on weight, full body, by old classmates for fatphobia, attack on my overweight (“whale”, “fat cow”, “will lose weight”, “you will find never someone who will love you” “dirty fat”, “you disgust”,...), and by those around me during my anorexia, often during meals when I ate little or nothing (“skeleton”, “if you fall you break”, “eat more”, “you’re too skinny”, “you’re a bone”, “you caught the cancer or what”,...)

Always witnesses, never action, I took the attacks on my weight when I was overweight as harassment, because it was recurrent. During my anorexia it was more targeted around mealtimes, or when I was forced to weigh myself in front of relatives. (*Woman - 21yo*)

TESTIMONY #9

I have a lot of acne (face, neck and back), but being intolerant to a lot of products I can’t cure it. Because of this, I also didn’t wear makeup, so my acne was visible. I was in the last year of High School, I was discussing my love life which was too calm (I had never had a boyfriend) and a “friend” told me that it was normal given my skin; that at almost 18, you no longer have acne. That I won’t please anyone, and that I was ugly. Then she violently criticized my general physical appearance (I’m “flat”, I have dry hair that I can’t do anything about, droopy eyelids, etc.). Everyone

heard it in the hallway, huddled together and laughed for a good 10 mins. From that moment, my friends called me “the pustular” or “the calculator” (*Woman - 21yo*)

TESTIMONY #10

Weight (*Woman - 25yo*)

TESTIMONY #11

It started young, in college, around the 4th grade, so when I was 13 or 14, at the time of puberty, being brunette, I have black hair and my classmates made fun of me for that. Especially in sports. There are different memories that stood out, one day in class, my two classmates in front turned around (a boy and a girl) to ask me if I was shaving, I was extremely embarrassed because I had recently started to do it and I didn’t want to tell my stalkers about it. I think I didn’t answer anything and they continued to chat among themselves trying to include me to say “I wax my mustache and you?” Another time we were doing a game in tech class, we had to guess who we were and I got Chewbacca (I love Star Wars but I knew that wasn’t the reference), I don’t know who chose this character but most people in my class bullied me so it could have been anyone. Even in high school where I thought I was done with that and school bullying, I had put on shorts in the summer and I heard the following sentence from a classmate behind me in class “when you put on shorts, you shave”, she was speaking to a guy in the class that I liked. It was really hurtful especially since I already had a complex because of my bullying in college. I also had remarks about my hair in college, a lot of remarks because they always got greasy quickly and during sports,

my girl friends often told me that I could make fries with my hair, they asked me what shampoo I used, how many times a week I washed my hair, etc. Or in high school from the boys in my class that I had no boobs, that I was flat, like a breadboard. I have lost count of the times people have commented on my body hair, my hair or my breasts. Most of it was remarks made by girls, either directly to me in different classes or to others but loud enough for me to hear. I was already the target of school harassment and that was part of it too. I hid my body a lot, especially my legs and armpits so that you wouldn't see that I had the slightest hair. Today, I accept myself and I am very comfortable with my body, my hair, my body hair, even if sometimes I don't have confidence in myself when I go out without being shaved. (*Woman - 24yo*)

TESTIMONY #12

Verbal, about my height and my weight. I have always been the smaller and I have always had a small weight (born prema). In college, the 3rd graders at that time told me that I "had gone to the wrong school" and that I had to go back to primary school. It still happens to me today to have remarks from work colleagues, or certain members of my family: "You're not a dwarf?", "aren't you considered anorexic?", "You're too skinny!". (*Woman - 23yo*)

TESTIMONY #13

Little at school, I was "fat" compared to my friends, and once in sports a boy said to me "I don't want to touch her, she's as heavy and big as a fridge" (*Cis woman - 20yo*)

TESTIMONY #14

In bed with one of my hookups, he runs his hands over my body and exclaims: "But you're actually round!"

At 58kg for 1m60 we don't expect it at all. After explanations I understood that he was pleasantly surprised by my curves. However, my eating disorders that I had managed to channel came back very strongly in the weeks that followed. (*Woman - 25yo*)

TESTIMONY #15

A negligence on my body that it is not looked at and does not count. My curly hair and my rather large size, my very round face were looked down upon. Or rather, I didn't have a model of beauty for a woman with a round face who was tall AND round. The teasing came from guys I didn't know and who looked at me badly. One of the facts that I remember took place during a trip to Argentina where during a walk on the snow in the Andes I had difficulty overcoming the slopes due to a fear that dates from childhood of the slopes in the mountains. But I found myself behind someone who wasn't waiting for me and I was pushed to move forward. (*Woman - 23yo*)

TESTIMONY #16

I started the pill for a year and a half now, in 4 months I gained 15 kilos (without changing my diet, doing sports as before). That didn't stop my dad, sister, and brother from pointing it out to me every day I spent with them on vacation. I was so complexed that I skipped all evening meals, and exercised excessively but without great results. I see them every 3 months and unfortunately it's the same revival and they don't understand

what they're doing. (*Woman - 20yo*)

TESTIMONY #17

I have a lot of problems in my love life. I am 1.69 meters tall, which seems not to appeal to women. Having Tinder on my phone, I match with a number of girls. The conversation is pretty good, but in a lot of cases they ask me my height. I don't like to lie, so I tell the truth, which seems to put them off right away - or they tell me I'm "too small".

I also don't feel very well on social networks because sometimes I am drowned in the tik-toks of certain women who idealize tall men. Moreover, these expectations are sometimes unrealistic. (*Man - 23yo*)

TESTIMONY #18

My mother: looks askance at me when I eat, constantly repeats to me to be careful, serves me mini plates, etc., which she never does with my brothers. Other remarks such as: "Oh it pokes you", "Oh you should take at least one size above" (namely that I am a 34/36, that I have eating disorders since I was 10 years old) (*Woman - 20yo*)

TESTIMONY #19

It was when I was in middle school, 6th grade. I was someone who didn't pay attention to physical appearance, I just dressed comfortably (wide jeans, T-shirt, sweatshirt, hair always tied in a ponytail), which was very badly perceived. I never had skirts/dresses, I didn't wear makeup, I didn't carry handbags etc... Likewise for my weight, I've always been quite thin, with very little shape (not boobs, no ass). For clarification, my gender has always been female, I was born as a girl and I identify with that gender as well.

Following this I was harassed by people in my class for 2 years, with remarks almost daily (every time I was in college) about the fact that I looked like a skeleton, that I was ugly, disgusting, that no one wanted me, that I was not a girl, etc. It ranged from verbal abuse in progress to physical abuse on the way between my college and my home (throwing stones, beaten with sticks). My teachers and the school were aware and since I did not denounce people, they did nothing. So I waited for the harassment to stop on its own...

(*Woman - 21yo*)

TESTIMONY #20

I think it was the first time that I was given this kind of reflection and that it really impacted me. So I was 8 years old and I was with my father, in Paris. He had a wife, Saadia, and she was obese. Although I saw him with my childish eyes, I was too young to question his appearance. I don't know why she told me that, especially since at the time I was a perfectly normal weight, but still, she started telling me that I was fat. She said it in front of my big sister who took it back later. She didn't say it to me meanly, rather as if she suddenly realized it and she insisted on it for a moment. She told me I was fat, bigger than her, even. And I know that shocked me because even if I had never thought about it, I said to myself that it was true that she was fat, that in addition, as she was tall, she looked much larger than it does now. So I said to myself that from the height of my meter ten, I must really be huge. And I know that from then on, I struggled to see my body as anything other than huge. (*Woman - 21yo*)

TESTIMONY #21

It happened that many times, and many people took part (classmates, family members, etc.).

I have always been thin, even skinny, without trying to be. In addition, I am a small frame.

At the age when the remarks started, I was 1m37 for 33kg. So certainly I was not thick, but I had nothing to do with it.

However, everyone told me to eat more, that I looked sick, that I was a skeleton, etc. It was really painful because I ate well and even exercised. I was not in poor health, far from it.

Everyone was aware because, except for a few friends, everyone was participating. Around my 17 years, since my weight seemed more “suitable” for others and that I had finished my puberty (therefore developed my chest), they began to leave me alone, even if that never stopped members of my family (my paternal grandmother in particular) to make inappropriate remarks.

Fortunately, I had learned to defend myself. In the end, it caused me a lot of anxiety, and I developed a real obsession with my thinness, because it was the only “part” of my body that I was told about. I’m still obsessed with being thin and actively trying to never hit 50kg, even if that was years ago. (*Woman - 23yo*)

TESTIMONY #22

My mother who reproaches me for not shaving my hair, that she finds it repulsive and disgusting. (*Woman - 27yo*)

TESTIMONY #23

I’ve always had a hard time accepting my body, I’ve never been thin and delicate like most of my Asian family members or friends.

Baby, I was already chubby!

As I am an adopted child, my parents always wanted me to have everything, often gave in to my whims, and sometimes gave me more than I needed, especially in terms of food.

This meant that I was always within the norm but on the verge of being overweight according to my growth curve, which I kept more or less stable thanks to the many sports I practiced. I dreaded each time the visit to the pediatrician who told my mother that I had to be careful about my weight. Following which my mother put me on a “diet” which consisted of eating normally during the day but cottage cheese and fruit in the evening, and this from my 7 to 12 years old, which was quite frustrating for a child.

During kindergarden and elementary school, although we were only a few racialized children, I did not really suffer any kind of discrimination, but it started in middle school where some children criticized my physical appearance and racially by calling me “Tching tchong” or “big pig”, punctuated with “you disgust me”. Among my childhood friends too, I was often called “the whale”. It also happened that I was called “Mario” in reference to my lip hair.

Then around the age of 14 I began to practice rowing intensely, to sculpt myself and lose my childhood curves but the criticism persisted, I remembered the insults and could not appreciate my body. In high school, when I was at my ideal weight, some friends would reflect on how much I ate or put their arms or legs next to mine to compare and observe the difference in width. A time, rather unpleasant, without counting the ordinary racism, to be called the “noich” or the “chinetoque” (thinking to be friendly) where-

as I am Vietnamese...

In all these situations of mockery, those who pronounced them were either friends with whom I could have a good time otherwise, or children with whom I could usually get along well, what they said made the others laugh or was not necessarily raised and sometimes these words were not said to hurt but were just remarks that they made aloud to each other. This mainly happened at school and always in front of other people, I was never alone with those who insulted me, I think it was mainly for them to show off their friends rather than to really harass out of spite.

At home, it sometimes happened that my parents made me comments about my weight, told me to watch what I ate or said to me “do you really want to get more?”.

Small remarks wanting to be benevolent and concerning my health but not helping with self-confidence, especially when I did not feel beautiful either at home or outside.

During my period in high school and the start of higher education, I chained up dubious and unbalanced diets which made me lose a lot in a few weeks but regain double, then I released all the pressure of the diets and no longer controlled my diet, which made me gain almost 20kg in 1 year. I no longer received criticism from outside because I no longer saw my friends from high school but still suffered parental remarks like “you would be even prettier if you lost a few pounds”. (*Cis woman - 23yo*)

TESTIMONY #24

Hair story!

I have a passing girl cis. I am very white and very very brown. Very young I started to be very hairy. Personally, I didn't care. But very

quickly I got a lot of teasing and insults. My sister has darker skin and very light brown, almost beardless. She's an ultra normalized straight cis Barbie. She made fun of me daily “little monkey”. One day, she decided to forcibly shave my legs, arms, mustache... while saying that I had to be “a real girl”. Obviously, it traumatized me, she cut me in several places. But my hair has grown back even thicker and blacker. (*Non-Binary Half-Boy Fem - 33yo*)

TESTIMONY #25

I was coming back from the beach, it was August 2020 and I was walking alone in the street, in the middle of the afternoon, to the apartment of the girlfriend who was hosting me there (La Garde).

I kept my swimsuit, rather indented at the level of the chest, on which I had slipped shorts. I, who often pay attention to what I wear on the street (yes, I adapt according to the places where I go, the transport I use, etc.), that day, I felt good and I didn't want to put on my T-shirt again. After all, we're near the sea, I'm coming back from the beach, I have the right.

At one point, a car stops at a red light, I pass near it. The light soon turns green, the car starts and I hear a man's voice shouting at me: “Hey ma'am, you have to get dressed!”. The car disappears, and with it the amazement. I didn't say anything, I didn't defend myself, I feel guilty of course and then I understand that I didn't even have time for that, to put together a solid argument or simply to send it stroll! I didn't even see his face, he didn't introduce himself and I have to deal with that on the way back. He ruined my mood. I'm pissed now and still can't believe it, but there's also this little something that's

even more annoying: I'm questioning myself "Is this outfit too daring?", "Isn't it done?"

While I know that men walk around in bare-chested shorts all day long in seaside resorts and no one tells them anything! I know all this and yet the "shame" has made its way.

And here is a fine example of what I call "women's privilege"! Ironically, of course. (*Cis woman - 32yo*)

TESTIMONY #26

I started my hormonal transition a year ago. I'm quite satisfied because, for the first time in my life, I really feel that I like what I'm looking at in the mirror.

As a black trans woman, there is a lot of fetishism around our identities. People are obsessed with what affects our transition more than our own person. Quite often when I announce to a man that I am a trans woman or that he suspects it, the first questions will always be in relation to my genitals: if I have a penis or a vagina. There, you realize that a stranger has no trouble asking you what your sex looks like.

As a black man, I suffered a lot from the fetishism of the white gay community. I had comments about my genitals being supposedly "big" and "black men are not allowed to be anything but a sex object that is there to please them". (*Young trans woman*)

TESTIMONY #27

I was in college where having curly hair was frowned upon. We refer you to the fact of being mixed-race, of having such and such an origin and what that should look like. There was the "you're mixed race so you have to have such a type of character, you have to be

athletic, you have to be thin with a rounded neck..." And above all you choose how mixed you are going to be: either you stiffen your hair, or you had to wear pigtails altogether. In prep class, they had elected the most beautiful girl of the class. The most beautiful was a very dark Caribbean girl and the second was me. The excuse was: "she is black so she has a black ass and you are mixed race so you have a half black ass". I was like, "ah but that's supposed to be a compliment. And that means that at the level of the buttocks, I am worse than a black girl but better than a white girl?" (*Young woman*)

TESTIMONY #28

All my life I was told, I was taught that beauty, femininity, gentleness, grace was the very embodiment of a European woman, that black women were millions of miles away from that. (*Young woman*)

TESTIMONY #29

Returning from a stay abroad. Weight gain probably linked to a new diet and hormones. Return to the family and significant weight gain (10kg aprox). Comments on my physical appearance and the fact that he was going to have to lose the weight gained. (*Woman - 25yo*)

TESTIMONY #30

I met three times older white men coming to talk to me, and even to invite me to their house, or to offer me something. They were strangers in the street, I find that very incredible and incomprehensible. The only reason I can think of is that I'm a young Asian and can come across as easy to flirt with. (*Woman - 25yo*)

TESTIMONY #31

When I went shopping with my mother, I walked into a store to try on a top. The saleswoman saw the top that I was going to try hanging in my cabin and just when I was going to close the curtain she took the top from me and told me that the top was not going to fit me, given my morphology.

I was stunned because she went right away with it and I didn't say a word. Neither does my mother. We left right after. (*Woman - 23yo*)

TESTIMONY #32

Context: in sports class we do exercises with parallel bars.

I am petrified at the idea of going on the parallel bars.

Witnesses: all other students.

My sports teacher (cis woman, white, about 55 years old) who looks at me and says: "Ah, no, you don't climb on the bars, you'll break them".

Me: crying. (*Cis woman - 23yo*)

TESTIMONY #33

I am at a station to catch a train after an intense day of lessons. I'm hungry, I take myself a McDonalds that I eat on a bench at the station. And a passer-by calls out to me: "You shouldn't eat that, you're too fat". And he leaves. In fact, he didn't even stop to speak. He threw this sentence while walking. The phrase appeared out of nowhere as quickly as he disappeared. But I never forgot. (*Woman - 30yo*)

TESTIMONY #34

It was in college and high school, I've always been complexed by my nose and my face be-

cause of my redness, my veins under my eyes and my nose precisely, and I've always been complexed also by my skin color.

Because I was always told that I had a pig nose, that I was red like a tomato or something and that I was as white as an ass and that's hard because I've always had skin problems. That's why I'm often red on my face, you can see my veins enormously, why I'm so white, I can't tan and so on. My boyfriend and my friends helped me a lot. (*Woman - 22yo*)

TESTIMONY #35

On my body, because my classmates made fun of me for being "skinny". They called me "skeleton". Then, when I got to high school, things changed, people asked me how I managed to be "skinny", everyone wanted my figure. (*Women - 24yo*)

TESTIMONY #36

Stereotype of a North African who is without situation, spending his days betting, with social assistance or in his neighbourhood. (*Man*)

TESTIMONY #37

It was on my body, I gained weight after confinement and I said that I messed up because I gained 15kg in a few months and I absolutely wanted to get back to my old shape, it was for myself because I was playing football and I didn't have to gain a lot of weight. (*Man - 22yo*)

TESTIMONY #38

This happened in college, some girls in my class told me that I had big breasts (I was wearing a tight t-shirt). Knowing that I was already not comfortable with that, I was

even worse. After that, I tried to put on loose clothes and tried to hide them as best I could.

(Woman - 21yo)

TESTIMONY #39

When I was younger, I was rounder than I am now and I was often told that I had a beautiful face but that I would be more beautiful if I were less fat, which made me to go on a diet.

(Woman - 20yo)



Chapter 3

Disabling bodies : ableism and the impact of attitude

This chapter will introduce the topic of Ableism and Attitude. Defining what is meant by 'ableism'; a comparison of the Social Model of Disability with the Medical Model of Disability; an exploration of stereotypes; representation/misrepresentation of disability in the media and the consequences related to this are all within this chapter. It will also reflect on how ableist attitudes can impact on a disabled person's body image and how ableist attitudes can result in hate speech or hate crime and body shaming.

3.1 What is ableism?

Ableism is defined as 'discrimination in favour of non-disabled people' by scope.org.uk³³. This can range from discrimination in the workplace, lack of access and social exclusion. Ableism is based on the assumption that disabled people 'need fixing'. As a result of this, disabled people can experience discrimination. Rosen K.M and Mill J.S. (2016) referred to ableism as "*insidious societal messages regarding the need to fix, cure, rehabilitate, lose weight and/or improve mobility*."³⁴ Societal messages and attitudes need to change in order to combat harmful attitudes that include prejudice, stereotyping, misconceptions and generalisations of the disabled community. In an ableist society, there is a higher value preference attributed to '*fit/healthy bodies*'³⁵. The question to consider is, if body-shaming is the '*act or practice of subjecting someone to criticism or mockery for supposed bodily faults or imperfections*,'³⁶ and if an ableist society is based on the preference for 'fit/healthy' non-disabled bodies, does this cause negative attitudes towards disability and result in body shaming?

³³ <https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/disablism/#:~:text=Ableism%20is%20discrimination%20in%20favour.has%20a%20problem%20with%20ableism%E2%80%9D>.

³⁴ Rosen K.M, Mills J.S, What persons with physical disabilities can tell us about obesity, "Health Psychology Open" January-June 2016 pp 1-3

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/body-shaming>

3.2 Social Model of Disability vs Medical Model of Disability

A turning point in disability history was *The Social Model of Disability*, inspired by the Disability Rights Movement in the 1960s/70s, and was built to challenge the Medical Model of Disability. The Medical Model of Disability is rooted in ableism and presents the barriers a disabled person faces as the result of disability and not as a problem with society. It viewed disability as *‘an individual, medical problem that needed to be prevented, cured or contained; and/or as a charitable issue that viewed Disabled people as unfortunates who needed to be pitied and catered for by segregated, charitable services.’*³⁷

The Social Model of Disability was developed in response to the exclusion, discrimination and lack of choice and control disabled people experienced in daily life, and the prevailing negative attitudes in society.

The Social Model of Disability states:

*“that people have impairments but that the oppression, exclusion and discrimination people with impairments face is not an inevitable consequence of having an impairment, but is caused instead by the way society is run and organised.”*³⁸

Some of the barriers caused by the way society is run and organised include:

- inaccessible building, eg. no ramps, no lifts, lack of clear signage;
- inaccessible public transport;
- no sign language interpreters or accessible formats available at events etc;
- segregated schooling;
- discrimination;
- attitude e.g., not valuing disabled people;
- failure to employ disabled people/offer promotions;
- lack of workplace adjustments;
- inaccessible education system;
- lack of opportunities for housing and choice of where to live and with who.

3.3 Stereotypes and Misrepresentation of Disability in the Media

Ju Gosling (2011) suggests that stereotyping of disabled people is rooted in ‘religious and cultural beliefs about ‘imperfect’ bodies that have existed for millennia’³⁹. Gosling suggests that there is a history of disabled people having always been regarded with suspicion and as potentially threatening; that in some religions and throughout history it was believed that mental and physical impairments were signs of sinning or further still, regarded as ‘demonic

³⁷ www.inclusionlondon.org.uk

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Gosling, J. *Abnormal, How Britain became body dysphoric & the key to a cure*, Bettany Press, p.100

possession’⁴⁰

Some of these suspicions and beliefs have been carried through to popular culture via different forms of media, due to storytellers drawing on religious writings ‘that relied on the shorthand of body type and appearance to denote character, with physical impairment being used to signify varying degrees of evil as well as inferiority’⁴¹.

Examples of these attitudes and beliefs entering popular culture can be seen in film, tv, and other media. According to Martin Norden (1999), moviemakers more often than not photograph and edit their work to reflect a non-disabled perspective and movies have played a major role in perpetuating mainstream society’s perceptions of disabled people where the images portrayed differ sharply from the realities of the disabled experience⁴². The tropes that appear range from being heroic/courageous for rising against the odds i.e. the inspiration, the comedian, the wise sage, the villain and innocent that receives a cure.⁴³

3.4 Representation of Disability in the media

For disabled people in the UK it is the lack of representation in advertising and the media that is the problem, which can cause negative body image.

Statistics from a survey carried out in 2019-2021 by the Women and Equalities Committee, *Body Image Survey Results*⁴⁴ on how different groups of people feel about their body image and what influences those feelings revealed that;

- 1 in 5 disabled people reported that they ‘never’ felt represented in media and advertising;
- 20% of people with a disability report ‘never’ seeing themselves reflected in images in media and advertising compared with only 10% of people without a disability.

Some of the comments in the publication stated that:

*“I am disabled and have literally never seen a woman with my disability represented in any kind of media” (Woman 18–24)*⁴⁵

“The media DESPERATELY need to be more inclusive, with different body types, different races, people with different disabilities even down to showing people with hearing aids being shown. Major change need to happen to allow everyone in society to feel body positive”(

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Norden, M.F., *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies*, Rutgers University Press, p.1

⁴³ Norden, M.F., *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies*, Rutgers University Press p.3

⁴⁴ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee *Body Image Survey Results First Special Report of Session 2019–21* <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2691/documents/26657/default/>

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.8

Woman 18-24)⁴⁶

"I am an overweight wheelchair user. I rarely see younger wheelchair users represented, nor those with chronic illness which can cause weight gain. It's a sometimes depressing life to lead with no support and no role models." Man (35 - 44)⁴⁷

When it came to body image it was reported that 71% of people with a disability reported feeling negative or very negative about their body image compared with 60% of people without a disability. People with disabilities spoke of how negative experiences with healthcare professionals, often focusing exclusively on their weight, had impacted their physical and mental health as well as their body image. Additionally, people with disabilities reported feeling ignored, judged and isolated about their appearance.

Gosling has highlighted that, when disabled people *are* being represented in the media it is usually in the form of being recipients of charity (e.g. Telethon, Children in Need) and in documentaries that are essentially an update of the old-fashioned freak show.⁴⁸

3.5 Attitudes, Hate Speech/Crime and Body Shaming

In a report carried out on *Online abuse and the experience of disabled people*,⁴⁹ it was noted that time and time again online abuse reflected wider attitudes towards disabled people and their lack of visible representation.

According to the report, Sense discovered that 49% of non-disabled people do not believe that they have anything in common with disabled people and 26% admit that they have avoided engaging in conversation with a disabled person. Scope's research shows that 43% of the British public say that they don't know anyone who is disabled and a majority (67%) feel awkward around disability. It also found that 21% of 18 to 34-year-olds admit that they have avoided talking to a disabled person because they weren't sure how to communicate with them. Many of the participants in the report spoke of the need to improve attitudes towards disability and suggested that they didn't believe that online abuse of disabled people could be tackled without changing attitudes.⁵⁰

Some of the abuse that disabled people were experiencing were due to wider political assumptions about disabled people on benefits. One respondent noted the range of people's attitudes towards disability, particularly online, they stated "We are either paralympians or

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 27

⁴⁷ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee Body Image Survey Results First Special Report of Session 2019-21 <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2691/documents/26657/default/> p.26

⁴⁸ Gosling, J. *Abnormal, How Britain became body dysphoric & the key to a cure*, Bettany Press, p.6

⁴⁹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcompetitions/759/75905.htm>

⁵⁰ Ibid

benefit scroungers.”⁵¹

The attitude of some people towards disabled people as being “benefit scroungers” has led to some disabled people being targeted and shamed for being on benefits. It was reported that online abuse that was received in relation to disabled people that there were “repeated accusations of benefit fraud or being ‘a drain on society’. Threats of being reported for benefit fraud for posting images of themselves outside the home or being involved in political activism.”⁵²

The lack of knowledge around a range of disabilities and impairments has resulted in people with hidden disabilities being targeted for “not looking disabled enough” while people with visible disabilities are targeted for how they look.⁵³

This lack of understanding and negative attitude towards disability is damaging to the disabled person and disabled community. It is important that we keep challenging these attitudes, create a better understanding of disability and increase awareness of the disabling factors in the world around us.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpetitions/759/75905.htm>

Workshop held in Belfast, Northern Ireland



Testimonies collected in Northern Ireland



TESTIMONY #1

In the last year of school I began to notice a slight tremor in my hands when stressed. I received negative attention from some classmates over this which made me extremely self-conscious. I felt disconnected and embarrassed of my body.

TESTIMONY #2

I am a short person. I am a short man. Men are supposed to be tall. If men are not tall, they are viewed as weak, unattractive, unsuccessful. I know this because my sisters told me this most of my teenage life, then my friends, then colleagues. It is constant. If you were taller, you could do a or b. It is constant.

TESTIMONY #3

I was relatively tall and thin from an early age. I was the second tallest in my class throughout primary school. I liked having short hair, preferred wearing jeans and shorts and felt uncomfortable wearing dresses. I was physically very active, enjoying sports like football and climbing trees.

I was frequently body shamed and mocked by other children and adults because of my height and because I behaved more like a boy. At school we were told that boys were more intelligent than girls and I resented the fact that girls were not given the same sup-

port and opportunities the boys were given. I could see many of the girls including myself outperforming the boys and I suspect we were deliberately held back and limited.

This was complicated by the fact that I struggled with some school work, such as spelling because of undiagnosed dyslexia. My teacher told me he would give the class a holiday if I ever got full marks on the daily spelling test for a week. Despite my best efforts I never did.

I was often referred to as a 'tom boy' and my nickname was 'daddy long legs'. I did not feel conventionally pretty and my mother would criticise my appearance, comparing me to other girls with long hair and wishing I was more like them. This affected my self-confidence and I felt unattractive and uncomfortable in my own skin.

This was compounded by the fact that I developed earlier than other girls in my class. I was the first to start having periods when I was ten. To begin with they were light and irregular but this meant having to bring sanitary towels to primary school and being told to only speak to female teachers about it.

At this time I developed bad acne on my face and I became very short sighted. It took me two years to persuade my mother to take me to get my eyes tested. Eventually I had to wear heavy national health black glasses to school. I was called names like specky four eyes and Joe 90. This, along with my bad skin made me feel very self-conscious and withdrawn as a teenager. As a result I suffered badly with poor sleep, night terrors, depression and low self-esteem, which continued

well into adulthood.

TESTIMONY #4

It's a small example but a unique disability experience. Coming home from a trip to the hospital where I had been for two weeks due to excessive clotting in my lungs and leg which as my doctor said had no exact cause therefore I had to take medication for the rest of my life. However as soon as I got home the first thing people asked was "was it because of your weight?" "Oh so if you exercise will you get taken off medication" had it from multiple people including close family. When in fact the reason I ended up in hospital was because of the stigma around my weight. I had been having breathing problems for a while but the internalised shame was so much I waved it off as being fat and unfit. When in fact I had a pulmonary embolism. Since I never went to the doctor it wasn't until I could barely walk 2 metres and my leg swelling up to twice the size did I finally go to the hospital. could've caught the problem earlier but my internalised shame prevented me. So to be presented with even more assumptions that me being overweight was the cause and that if I was thin i would be healthy just compounded that Shame further.

TESTIMONY #5

Maternity hospital staff made a big issue of my weight saying it would affect scans and increase risk, then after the birth staff complained my breasts were too big for breastfeeding and took the joy out of the experience. I hated my body for a while after that.

TESTIMONY #6

At school, a horrible girl said I would die before I was 30 because I am fat. I hated PE because I had to do it in pants and a blouse and was exposed as larger than my peers.

TESTIMONY #7

At work, a colleague regularly shamed me for weight, circles under my eyes and my hair colour. Boss said I had no witness so I could not prove it.

TESTIMONY #8

My experience of body shaming has changed over time. As a teenager I was my own worst critic. I had very red cheeks as a child and teenager and was so self conscious of them. I used to get flushed at the slightest thing and my peers would often point this out making me socially anxious of being in the spotlight. Thankfully I was a teenager before social media and I can't imagine the pressure now put on children to look a certain way. As I grew older my complexion has changed and become more drawn and I no longer have my gorgeous red cheeks! I now put on blusher!! Imagine. I am still affected by how I think others perceive me as I age and by the social media bombardment telling me to defy the ageing process but the older I get the prouder I am of my body. I have birthed 3 children naturally and a fourth by C section. I have breastfed four children. I carry the scars of childbirth and the wrinkles of sleepless nights and worries of motherhood but my image and what I see reflected in the mirror shows I have led a life. I have sunbathed on the beach as a twenty something wearing baby oil and burn me written on my forehead! I have drunk the head of myself,

pulled all nighters and ate nothing but junk food whilst at university. I have experienced unbelievable grief and happiness in equal measure and I think all these life experiences contribute to the subconscious image I present to the world. I am never happy with a photograph of me but that is just my critical mind as I am on the whole happy with the skin I am in but that comes with 44 years of experience in it and I am looking forward to another 60 years of the same!

TESTIMONY #9

My mum told me I was too fat from the beginning of puberty

TESTIMONY #10

Being asked when the baby was due and patting my stomach when I wasn't pregnant but overweight. In a room full of people.

TESTIMONY #11

Someone in school pointed to a mole on my arm and said "ew". Another experience in school was when someone commented on my nose by saying it was a "ski slope". Both incidents made me feel embarrassed and self-conscious.

TESTIMONY #12

Having anxiety on and off in my early 20s and ongoing has made my weight go up and down. When I have been slimmer I have had compliments for losing weight or told I "look well". This has made me feel pressure to maintain a certain weight and I have had comments in the past when I have put weight on. It makes you feel not valued as much when you start putting on weight.

TESTIMONY #13

I have experienced body shaming my entire life for my weight and alternative sense, but the worst shaming has been after my chronic pain and physical disabilities developed at 19. People would say that I was faking it, how I looked limping, and generally dictate much more extreme comments about the effects of my weight and build and movements of my body. It's difficult to come to terms with pain and your body changing, it's harder to come to terms with the societal view you can sometimes experience and a lack of compassion at times when you may need it!

TESTIMONY #14

It was not pleasant and extended from verbal to physical abuse.

TESTIMONY #15

Overall, I like my body but I do not like my hernia.

TESTIMONY #16

Being put into a mindset of being annoying and stupid. That my personality was annoying people and I was too stupid to see this.

TESTIMONY #17

Chunky, Buck Tooth

TESTIMONY #18

Paranoid

TESTIMONY #19

Skinny/Ugly. Specky Four Eyes. Daddy Long Legs

TESTIMONY #20

Spotty

TESTIMONY #21

Cripple

TESTIMONY #22

Depresso

TESTIMONY #23

Mess

TESTIMONY #24

Faking it

TESTIMONY #25

Scary

TESTIMONY #26

Weird

TESTIMONY #27

Hop Along

TESTIMONY #28

Feral

TESTIMONY #29

Melter

TESTIMONY #30

Scrawny

TESTIMONY #31

Needs to try harder

TESTIMONY #32

Fat

TESTIMONY #33

Spastic

TESTIMONY #34

Deaffo

TESTIMONY #35

Chunk

TESTIMONY #36

Bogging

TESTIMONY #37

Haggard

TESTIMONY #38

Dog

TESTIMONY #39

Fag, Fruit, Poof

TESTIMONY #40

Faggot



Chapter 4

The hate speech phenomenon and the ways it reflects on the body

The world of mankind is bound by its verbal communication. Words, speech, language, signs, and symbols, mediate intellectual exchange between people. Thanks to language, past, present, and future can be communicated. The semantics of words in each language contains the way reality is constructed within an individual's mind. Speech has the power to unlock mental processes, psychological mechanisms and consequently create an impact. Arguably, words are the most powerful tool available to humanity, being able to evoke emotions and persuade to actions. Yet, although in Western societies there are standards that guide communication, they are mostly based on moral or ethical considerations. In particular, hate speech is at odds with the core values of a democratic society. It encourages or justifies intolerance against certain people based on the idea that these people are different because of particular characteristics. At the centre of the debate is where to draw the line between hate speech and freedom of speech. Should legal and other restrictions be imposed on derogatory terms, or is this a breach of basic human rights?

In the public sphere, there are two main discourses of the discussion- for the criminalization of hate speech and against. Judith Butler is among the most influential representatives of those who opposed it. In her analysis of the language of hate (Butler, 1997), she advocates that what hate speech mostly does is to present the subject in an inferior position. Butler's idea was driven by John Austin's book "How to Do Things with Words" (Austin, 1962), postulating that language is based on its performative dimension. In other words, saying something is in fact, doing something. Butler furthered the idea by suggesting that speech not only communicates hatred but can also cause harm and/or provoke violence. Yet, according to the English philosopher and political economist John Stuart Mill (see Bell, 2021), hate speech is an unavoidable part of free speech and nowadays, many are concerned that the criminalization of the phenomenon can lead to a culture of censorship.

Although the roots of hate speech can be traced through history, according to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), since 2017 there has been an increase in incidents involving it (EPIC, 2020). This has positioned hate speech as a particularly serious and worrying phenomenon, both offline and online, and yields the need for more overreaching and effective actions. Besides the political call, the ongoing collective efforts of schol-

ars, activist movements, public campaigns, non-profit organizations, educators, parents, etc have brought new perspectives and tools to oppose the problem. And even though the line between hate speech and freedom of speech is still somehow blurred, some actions can hold legal consequences. Ultimately, the main question is when hate speech can be classified as a hate crime, and what the most effective tools to tackle the problem are.

What Is Hate Speech

For the most part, hate speech is an umbrella term covering a range of hateful behaviour. The conceptual framework underlying the phenomenon emerges from the idea of separations and division- us as opposed to them or me against you (Paz, Montero-Díaz, & Moreno-Delgado, 2020). The point is to attack the dignity of an individual or group based on characteristics they possess such as (but not limited to) race, sex, colour, religion, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, migrant or refugee status, indigenous origin, personality traits, etc. In fact, anyone can become a target of “hate speech” just for being different. For instance, expressing hatred towards a political figure because you disagree with what they stand for is not necessarily hate speech. However, if hateful comments are made toward the politician with respect to their religious affiliation, skin colour, or sexuality, then it can be classified as hate speech. Although some claim that the real power of words is in their interpretation and that everyone deals with hate speech differently, the purpose of the comments can range from ignorant comments and insulting jokes to public calls for group discrimination, racism, or even genocide. In particular, the literature Post (2017) was able to identify four bases for defining hate speech (i.e. harm, content, intrinsic properties-type of words used, and dignity). Although these so-called categories are not empirically tested, they can assist when analysing/defining hateful content in terms of intention and potential impact.

The first category is considering hate speech in terms of the harm it can cause to the target, as suggested by Briston (1998). Particularly, this is the display of discrimination that can create a hostile, intimidating environment and consequently invade group representatives’ interests. Good examples are Trump’s numerous public appeals of intolerance that have incited additional threats and actions by his followers. For example, the former KKK leader David Duke said “We are determined to take our country back...We are going to fulfil the promises of Donald Trump”. The statement was made by Duke in a 2017 Charlottesville protest of white supremacists whose views have been validated by Trump’s speeches (Charlottesville Rally Part of Effort to ‘Take Country Back, 2017). The instance is a good example of the repercussions political calls can inflame.

The second basis for analyses is content-based, meaning focusing on the actions such comments can incite or encourage towards a group of individuals distinguished by a particular

characteristic (Parekh, 2012). Evaluating a claim on its content can help identify semantically equivalent statements expressed in different manners. For example, Islamophobia was a reoccurring theme in Emmanuel Macron's presidency, and he commonly condemned Islamic minorities, connecting them to terrorism. In particular, Macron made the following remarks:

1. "Even though we have defeated Daesh's territorial caliphate, the battle against Islamic terrorism is not over;"
2. Tweeting in Arabic that France 'will never give in'.

Although the former expression is more abrasive in comparison to the latter, the French president is communicating a similar message. Nevertheless, content-based accounts face the challenge of deciding which content can be classified as hate speech. Since the more vague appeal that France will not surrender does not incite hatred openly towards a particular group or individual, it is hard to decide whether it falls within the lines of hate speech or free speech.

The third so-called principle is related to the intrinsic properties of the words. This relates to speech that is inherently derogatory, discriminatory, dehumanizing, or vilifying, recognized as an insult among the majority in a cultural context. According to Kang (2022) classifying the phenomenon along these lines might be problematic as it refers only to hate speech that is explicit. Yet, there is hate speech that might carry a hateful message but does not necessarily contain derogatory terms. Lastly, dignity based conceptions are those primarily focused on undermining the dignity of an individual or a group (Waldron, 2012). Such speech generally aims to devalue the target, standing on popular biases, stereotypes, prejudices, or misconceptions. This type of speech includes categorizations in terms of group defamation.

However, what is challenging with this category is setting aside false statements from facts, and making the distinction between argumentative political speech and hate speech. Although the phenomenon can be viewed from different perspectives, it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide a universal definition of hate speech that does not obstruct the right to free speech. According to Bahador (2020), there is another subcategory related to hate speech- "early warning". Unlike the previously discussed categories, early warnings are conversations that border on what constitutes openly hateful speech. The author describes it as a starting point for future dehumanization or incitement, but is much more ambiguous or subtle. This category is particularly useful when in doubt about the intention of some remarks. Recognizing early signs of hate speech can help prevent further escalation towards more explicit and harmful language.

4.1. Hate Speech and How It Reflects on the Body

Before we go into exploring the topic further, it is crucial to set a clear scope of the present investigation. Through Recommendation R (97), the European Council has defined hate speech as publicly spoken words that are offensive, insulting, derogatory, and/or threatening to an individual or group based on a particular attribute. While targeted attributes may include such traits as ethnic background, sexual orientation, race, or disability, for the purpose of the present inquiry we will focus on hate speech with respect to people's appearance/physical attributes. In the English language besides the use of the term hate speech; there are other alternative expressions such as offensive speech, hateful speech, hatred speech, assaultive speech, and words that hurt. Although they carry similar meanings and can be used to describe the same act, in order to avoid possible confusion caused by their semantic nuances, we will adhere to the use of the term hate speech. In addition, when discussing the phenomenon its scope must be extended beyond verbal action, as hate speech can be applied to a broad array of behaviours, gestures, symbols, images, etc. that provoke the same effect (Brown, 2015).

Therefore, hate speech can be any form of verbal or non-verbal manifestation that aims to communicate hate.

As previously mentioned, the term "hate speech" is used as a general label for abusive, intimidating, or discriminatory messages against a minority or an individual. There are many subcategories that can be linked to the phenomenon based on their target (e.g. age, sexual, racial discrimination; sexism; religious hatred). In recent years, however, what has become particularly present is the form of hate speech directed toward one's physical characteristics. Fatphobia, skinny-shaming, sizeism, lookism, age/clothing/hair/bald-shaming, and more are all terms falling under the umbrella of body-shaming, used to describe a particular type of mockery and criticism of one's appearance. Hate speech addressing physical characteristics (i.e. body shaming) can occur as an insult, joke, and/or subtle comment, often leading to someone feeling ashamed of their body/features. In addition, body-shaming can be communicated in a direct or indirect way, by perception or association, and it can occur in different contexts (e.g. at the doctor's office, within a relationship media, immediate environment). Besides the mass messages about beauty and health standards, coming from celebrity culture and global marketing, the ethnic/ cultural background can considerably influence body ideals (Awad et al., 2015). Nevertheless, at present, there is a greater focus on an individual's appearance due to the current state of the Internet and popular social media platforms (Tan, Mat So'od, & Hamid, 2019). Shows, films, music, magazines, and favourite celebrities, all reinforce existing norms and new trends of appearance. As a result, the World Wide Web has become among the most influential sources of information among young people. The boom of social networking and other youth-oriented platforms has been a subject of much controversy. Initially, research was concerned with the prevalence of beautiful themes in youth-ori-

ented platforms, and how such exposures might influence the formation of attitudes, beliefs, and self-esteem (Gruber, & Grube, 2000).

Although body-shaming refers to one's physical appearance, it can negatively affect both mental and physical aspects of a person's everyday life. As suggested by Webb & Zimmer Gembeck (2014) the topic of body dissatisfaction is gaining significant attention from scholars and health workers, due to the fact that: a) it is a prevalent problem; b) has serious implications for the well-being of young people and adults. Yet, even though body shaming affects people of all ages, including the elderly population, the phenomenon has a greater effect on the younger generation due to the constant access to online images, content, advertising, and cyberbullying. In addition, across the academic literature, there is a general consensus that the period of adolescence is the most significant stage in the development of self-concept and body image marked by the onset of biological, emotional, and cognitive changes. It is a well-known fact that adolescence years are associated with an intense preoccupation with the physical self as the body suffers from major alterations, varying from sudden changes in weight, height, skin appearance, body/facial hair growth, and sweat production (Moore & Rosenthal, 2006). In turn, these changes trigger complex emotional and behavioural responses that may disrupt the process of adaptation.

Prior research shows that boys and girls are most concerned about their weight; and while girls want to be thinner, boys wish to be more athletic (e.g. Cohane & Pope, 2001; Davison & McCabe, 2006; Kenny, O'Malley-Keighran, Molcho, & Kelly, 2017). However, it seems that body dissatisfaction is much more common among girls, and is the main reason for eating disorders. Carey et al. (2011) found that there is a strong association between peer and personal body image dissatisfaction, especially among girls. It was also observed that girls view dieting as a group activity, where the entire group engages in the same behaviour. Also, according to a meta-analysis of 36 studies (Arcelus Mitchell Wales Nielsen, 2011) anorexia is a leading cause of death among teenage girls. Another biological factor that can play a significant role in young people's adjustment is the timing of puberty. According to Moore and Rosenthal (2006), early maturing boys have more advantages than the ones whose onset is delayed. Because the former group has a manlier appearance, they are often popular around peers, and adults tend to perceive them as more reliable and mentally mature. With respect to girls, research has been consistent with the findings that early puberty is more often than not unfavourable and has a higher potential to result in an eating disorder (Brook-Gunn & Reiter, 1990; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003). Late maturation among girls is experienced more favourably (compared to boys), but if the process is too delayed it can also cause serious distress.

Hate speech aiming to body shame someone may result in devastating consequences for an individual's physical and mental health. Above all, the target is very likely to develop body dissatisfaction, which in turn can increase the risk of subsequent eating pathologies such as

anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorders (Shafran, Fairburn, Robinson, & Lask, 2004). In particular, Jacobi et al. (2004) argued that gender, weight concerns, dieting, and negative body image are common predictors of eating disorders. In addition, body shaming can provoke physiological and behavioural changes linked to poor metabolic health and increased weight gain (Vogel, 2019). Other compulsive behaviours associated with the phenomenon are ritualistic body checking the behaviour of shape, weight, and size as well as body avoidance (Reas, Grilo, Masheb, & Wilson, 2005).

The outcomes of hate speech in response to someone's physical characteristics are symptomatically diverse. Besides the development of body dissatisfaction, eating pathology and compulsive body checking/avoidance, social anxiety, and shame can be shown as overlapping in the contexts of social attractiveness and criticism. There is emerging evidence that individuals subjected to body shaming often internalize the biases, which deepen their feeling of humiliation (Pinto & Phillips, 2005). Also, they are the ones who experience a higher need for social approval, social anxiety, shame, and low self-esteem. Due to the internalization of beauty and body ideals, such individuals are preoccupied with their physical self and experience greater social anxiety (Austin & Smith, 2008). As a result, they are reluctant to socialize and seek out relationships, which can create other intimacy-related problems. Depression, disturbed thinking, low self-esteem, and isolation are other typical symptoms arising from negative body image and body dissatisfaction. In some cases, those subjected to systematic body shaming as well as those who have internalized unrealistic body ideals (i.e. internalized oppression) become fixated with the criticized features. In turn, this hypervigilance can manifest itself in extreme conditions of self-harming behaviour or body dysmorphic disorder (Singh & Veale, 2019). Even though the latter outcomes are more likely to be considered exceptions, the literature suggests that it is an increasing concern among contemporary young people (LaGuardia-LoBianco, 2019).

Objectification theory offers a framework for understanding the processes that connect body shaming and body dissatisfaction. According to Sun (2018), we live in a culture that sexualizes bodies and consequently treats them as something to be looked at and evaluated. What is more, general attractiveness is often associated with positive life outcomes in pop culture, indirectly suggesting that appearance alone can bring success and gratification. Saying that we should not advertise obesity or other risky physical conditions/practices, but it is time to oppose and critically evaluate sources that inform our opinion of the bodily and the physical. It is time to consider the complexity of body shaming, evoke empathy, and challenge stereotypes that often go beyond personal biases and influence medical professionals and clinical guidelines. This is especially important with medics whose work involves aesthetics (dermatologists, dentists, plastic surgeons, nutritionists, etc.). Above all, hate speech and shaming are a threat to people's well-being as one's body image goes deeper than a scale or a mirror.

References

Arcelus J, Mitchell AJ, Wales J, Nielsen S. (2011). Mortality rates in patients with anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders. A meta-analysis of 36 studies. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 68(7):724-31. doi: 10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2011.74. PMID: 21727255.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: University Press

Awad, G. H., Norwood, C., Taylor, D. S., Martinez, M., McClain, S., Jones, B., Holman, A., & Chapman-Hilliard, C. (2015). Beauty and Body Image Concerns Among African American College Women. *The Journal of black psychology*, 41(6), 540–564. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798414550864>

Bahador, B. (2020). Classifying and Identifying the Intensity of Hate Speech. [online] *Items: Insights from the Social Sciences*. Available at: <<https://items.ssrc.org/disinformation-democracy-and-conflict-prevention/classifying-and-identifying-the-intensity-of-hate-speech/#:~:text=Three%20major%20categories%20of%20hate%20speech%201%20Dehumanization,for%20violence%20against%20them.%20...%203%20Early%20warning>> [Accessed 14 April 2022]

Bell, M. (2021). John Stuart Mill's Harm Principle and Free Speech: Expanding the Notion of Harm. *Utilitas*, 33(2), 162- 179. doi:10.1017/S0953820820000229

Brison, S. (1998). The Autonomy Defense of Free Speech. *Ethics*, 108(2), 312-339. DOI: 10.1086/233807

Brooks-Gunn, J., & Reiter, E.O. (1990). The role of pubertal processes in early adolescent transition. In *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent*, S. Feldman, and G. Elliott, eds. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Brown, Alex (2015). *Hate Speech Law: A Philosophical Examination*. Routledge.

Butler, Judith (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge.

Chapman, G. (2008). *Love as a way of life: seven keys to transforming every aspect of your life* (1st ed.). Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press.

Cohane, G. H., & Pope, H. G. (2001). Body image in boys: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 29(4), 373-379. doi:10.1002/eat.1033

Davison, T. E., & McCabe, M. P. (2006). Adolescent body image and psychosocial functioning. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 146(1), 15-30. doi:10.3200/SOCP.146.1.15-30

EPIC. (2020). HATE SPEECH: Understanding the phenomenon through different perspective. Online. Retrieved from <https://epicamif.eu/library/hate-speech-understanding-the-phenomenon-from-different-perspectives/?lang=en>

Jacobi, C., Hayward, C., de Zwaan, M., Kraemer, H. C., & Agras, W. S. (2004). Coming to terms with risk factors for eating disorders: Application of risk terminology and suggestions for a general taxonomy. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130, 19-65.

Kang, W. (2022). An Analysis of Types and Discourse Structure of Online Hate Speech Against Women. Institute Of Brain Based Education, Korea National University Of Education, 10(1), 59-76. DOI: 10.31216/bdl.2020.10.1.059

Kenny, U., O'Malley-Keighran, M., Molcho, M., & Kelly, C. (2017). Peer influences on adolescent body image: Friends or foes? *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 32(6), 768-799. doi:10.1177/0743558416665478.

LaGuardia-LoBianco, A.W. (2019). Understanding Self-Injury through Body Shame and Internalized Oppression. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 26(4), 295- 313. doi:10.1353/ppp.2019.0045.

Mazalin, D., & Moore, S. (2004). Internet use, identity development, and social anxiety among young adults. *Behaviour Change*, 21(2), 90-102. doi:10.1375/bech.21.2.90.55425

McCabe, M. P., & Ricciardelli, L. A. (2003). Sociocultural influences on body image and body changes among adolescent boys and girls. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 143(1), 5- 26. doi:10.1080/00224540309598428

Parekh, B. (2012). Is There a Case for Banning Hate Speech? Retrieved 9 April 2022, from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/content-and-context-of-hate-speech/is-there-a-case-for-banning-hate-speech/F4C4B6AA81DFF40234B75D4ED7399A44>

Paz, M. A., Montero-Díaz, J., & Moreno-Delgado, A. (2020). Hate Speech: A Systematized Review. *SAGE Open*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020973022>

Pinto, A., and Phillips, K. (2005). Social anxiety in body dysmorphic disorder. *Body Image*, 2(4), 401-405.

Post, Robert C.. (2017). Legitimacy and hate speech. University of Minnesota Law School. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <https://hdl.handle>.

net/11299/191509.

Reas, D. C., Grilo, C. M., Masheb, R. M., & Wilson, G. T. (2005). Body checking and avoidance in overweight patients with binge-eating disorder. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 37, 342-346.

Shafran, R., Fairburn, C. G., Robinson, P., & Lask, B. (2004). Body checking and its avoidance in eating disorders. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 35, 93- 101

Sun Q (2018) Materialism, Body Surveillance, Body Shame, and Body Dissatisfaction: Testing a Mediational Model. *Front. Psychol.* 9:2088. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02088

Singh, A. R., & Veale, D. (2019). Understanding and treating body dysmorphic disorder. *Indian journal of psychiatry*, 61(Suppl 1), S131-S135. https://doi.org/10.4103/psychiatry.Indian-JPsychiatry_528_18

Tan, K., Mat So'od, S. and Hamid, B., 2019. Communicating insults in cyberbullying. *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 11(3), pp.92-104.

Vogel, L., 2019. Fat shaming is making people sicker and heavier. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 191(23), pp.649-649.

Waldron, J. (2012). *The harm in hate speech*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674065086>.

Webb, H. J., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2014). The role of friends and peers in adolescent body dissatisfaction: A review and critique of 15 Years of research. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 24(4), 564-590. doi:10.1111/jora.12084

2017. David Duke: Charlottesville Rally Part of Effort to 'Take Country Back'. [video] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fULPIGwjJMA>> [Accessed 18 April 2022]

Workshop held in Sofia, Bulgaria



Testimonies

collected in Bulgaria



TESTIMONY #1

I remember when I was in sixth grade, one of my classmates had large breasts, while the other girls still didn't have any. The boys touched her and kept on saying that her tits were too big. Although it seemed like they are really interested in her, she was not feeling well at all.

TESTIMONY #2

I was about 12 and there was a boy in our class who wore his hair long. He was weird, and the other boys in the class didn't like him. They told him, "Girl! Girl! Only girls wear their hair this way!"

TESTIMONY #3

I have been insulted many times, but I remember a moment when several boys followed me on my way home and repeated "fat", "your belly is fat". I was crying, I was in a hurry, I was in a hurry to go home and hide.

TESTIMONY #4

When I was in 4th grade, a new boy moved in next door. I liked him and I wanted to meet him, he had noticed me too. One day my older sister came home and told me that this boy had asked her "who is that with the crooked teeth." This part of my body became my weakness, I avoided smiling. It took me many years to accept this trait as something ordinary. However, I do not think that it will ever cease to matter to me.

TESTIMONY #5

As a teenager, I had acne and acne scars. They called me "walnut face."

TESTIMONY #6

The most common stories related to body shaming in my life are related to people's weight. These situations began for the first time, perhaps around the age of 9-10, and continue till today (age 30). I actively participate in jokes about a person's weight. I take it as a joke, but sometimes I see that the other party is affected. These situations are always observed by more people (maybe 2-3). If there are no observers I would not joke with a person. Maybe I'm looking for attention from others through these actions.

TESTIMONY #7

The feeling of shame I was experiencing was provoked by being overweight in elementary school (mainly from 1st to 7th grade) when classmates made fun of my weight. I experienced mainly shame and guilt. Other children witnessed this, which intensified these feelings. I did not seek for help, I experienced it all alone, I closed myself in and sought solace through more food.

TESTIMONY #8

My friends made fun of my weight and my "protruding ears" as a child. But this new European name (i.e. Body shaming) for mockery is inappropriate. We are living in a culture of tolerance. Let's consider everyone's feelings - this builds a weak character and weak people who feel offended by anything that is different from their opinion.

TESTIMONY #9

A friend of mine had been planning to have a nose surgery for a long time. I know from his stories that from a very young age he was ridiculed for his crooked and big nose. He sometimes shared how children at school often called him words like “schnoz” or “mosquito.” Subsequently, this caused him discomfort, which he always felt in building his social contacts. When we were 19 years old we went out for a beer in a country town. While we were standing in the bar, we were approached by young people of the same age, who turned to my friend with the words: “Hey, what is this trunk?!?!” and “We drink alcohol with a mouth, not with a beak.” Apparently worried, my friend wanted to leave immediately. As we were returning home, he told me how much he was suppressed by the whole negative attitude and added: “I have the feeling that people don’t see me, they only see a huge crooked nose, but not me!”

TESTIMONY #10

If one looks, one can see/feel such situations on a daily basis with all sorts of combinations of participants and results. I can’t choose a specific one to describe - whatever one imagines would actually be a real story.

TESTIMONY #11

As a child I was often “mocked” that I was very hairy, abnormally, much for a child in 3rd, 4th grade, this was not pleasant for me and led to great anxiety and fixation in this “problem”, which actually is not a problem, but it probably took me a few years to realize it. I have not shared or sought help from anyone. I started shaving regularly.

TESTIMONY #12

I remember a classmate being called a pig by several boys in the class, even in the presence of a teacher. Students imitated the sounds of that animal in front of her. We were in junior high school, probably around 13 - years old. I don’t remember the teacher interfering, the girl had to defend herself and tell them to stop. In the break or in moments when we were a few girls, I saw her upset and looking for comfort. It brought me feelings of anxiety, confusion and shame.

TESTIMONY #13

I remember making fun of a friend of mine for being fat. She never said anything about that.

TESTIMONY #14

A friend of mine was rejected by a man she really likes, she was in love with him. He rejected her with the vulgar expression “you don’t have any tits!” which is obviously ugly and unacceptable and body shaming, and she had felt not only rejected but also humiliated, insignificant and so upset. She shared about this incident, which took place between the two of them in our common circle of friends. Since she assumed that that man had some sympathy for me the situation turned into a comparison between the two of us. She said “I can’t figure out what he likes in you so much, my hair is longer and prettier than yours, my nose, my eyes and ... look at your thighs, how could he like a woman with such thighs”. Until then, I had seen myself with perfectly normal thighs for my physique. This comparison hurt me, especially since I was not directly involved in the previous situation and even more so

because it was played out in front of an audience. Because she was very upset, I tried to calm her down and told her that she was beautiful, better than me, even that the man did not appreciate her, and so on. But I was sad, maybe mostly because my friend saw me that way, but I realized it was a reaction to her experience. The girl in question later attempted suicide, according to a psychiatrist, as a result of depression and some form of erotomania. And I talked about it with a psychologist, of course. My self-esteem has been affected by this situation and yes, now I am diligently training for the thighs because if something hurts you, it means you believe it is true :) It's confusing, as you can see. But I'm glad that I recognize "body shaming" and when it's hard for me to deal with my emotions I seek help. And I think that's very important, so share!

TESTIMONY #15

When I was in my early teens, other people made fun of me for having hair on my legs and arms. There was no one to turn to for such a thing because it is generally considered as not so important.

TESTIMONY #16

In elementary school, there was a classmate from the group of the "naughty children" who told me that I was hunchbacked. That happened in the corridor during a break and in the presence of other children. My "humpback" was due to a curvature of the spine and underdeveloped muscles. I felt inadequate, wrong, and different. I remember telling my parents. They advised me to "blunt" him with an equivalent remark next time. I don't remember being devastated for

long, but the fact that I remember the story 20 years later is eloquent enough.

TESTIMONY #17

A very close friend of mine from the Roma community has been called a "gypsy" over the years. She did not keep silent about the insults and defended herself by raising her voice and nagging, but I know that at times she felt offended and suffered. She shared with her parents, they advocated for her and quarrelled with the child/adult who insulted her for the colour of her skin.

TESTIMONY #18

Over the years, I have witnessed how my friends received remarks such as "fat", "you have to lose weight", "pig, look what you look like", etc., both from acquaintances and strangers. In most cases, they seemingly ignored the insults and remained silent. How should we actually react to this?

TESTIMONY #19

A neighbour who was quite chubby as a child/teenager had the nickname George the Fat. Often the gang sang in front of him and everyone else the refrain "George the Fat, from the confectionery ...". The age of the participants in the incident was between 7-15 years old. It has always been unpleasant for me to witness such situations, but I have not done anything.

TESTIMONY #20

I have dark skin, and for children, it means that you are a gypsy. I heard this insult for the first time at the age of 8. In general, I have heard this word about myself all my life. I was not affected in any way, but I have a

strong mentality.

TESTIMONY #21

I witnessed a situation in which my girlfriend was insulted and mocked. Another girl called my friend “fat”. Those who witnessed it were me and the friend of the bully. We were 14 years old. I tried to talk to my friend, asked her if she wanted to tell anyone, but she refused and chose to remain silent.

TESTIMONY #22

I remember a situation with 4 boys from the upper class who made fun of me because of my protruding ears. They called me with unpleasant for me words, which made me feel very uncomfortable, and since I was about 12 years old, it hurt me a lot. When I came home, I sometimes cried because of it. I tried to tell someone, but everyone’s advice was “Don’t pay attention to them and they’ll leave you.” It’s like they do it just because I pay attention to them and I’m the problem. The boys were about 15 years old.

TESTIMONY #23

I was born with different ears than other people, bigger and protruding. In my childhood, mostly up to 4th grade and a little later, I was often ridiculed. I remember a rather unpleasant case with a student from the next class. My friend and I were in the hallway for a break and we talked. I must have been 10-11 years old. This boy came up to me and stood very close, started looking at me and I was sure he was looking at my ears. I asked him what he wanted, and he said I was a freak and that my ears looked like monkeys, he even tried to pull my ear. He said I had to have plastic surgery ur-

gently, otherwise, they could take me to the circus-like a monkey. I really felt like a freak. I thought no one would ever like me as a girl. I always felt uncomfortable meeting someone. I had even glued my ears to my head once.

TESTIMONY #24

When I was 14-15 years old, I was overweight. All my relatives said that I needed to lose some weight. I felt that my friends, classmates, peers thought so. When I received compliments, they were limited to my face, my hair. Weight has always been a “but” in conversations about my appearance. I began to think and felt that my weight was a big issue. I started a diet and exercising, then I lost weight. However, for a long time after that, I saw myself fat in the mirror, even though I had dropped to a critically low weight.

TESTIMONY #25

As a child from 1st to 7th grade, I did not like my body. I was very fluffy and they were constantly making fun of me. I was an outsider. Nobody liked me. They called me watermelon or that I was pregnant.

TESTIMONY #26

When I was a teenager I had an awful lot of pimples on my face and they called me a “lunar landscape”.

TESTIMONY #27

I remember that when I was 15, a group of girls and I were in an amusement park. At one point, a group of younger children, about 8- 10 years old, approached us. One of my friends looked at one of the girls and said, “You’re very hairy, shave yourself.” The girl

was scalded, and so was I. I remembered that when I was at the age of that little girl I also thought I was “too hairy” and I was ashamed to wear shorts. Now (years later) I realize that my friend at that time, and before that, was a subject of body shaming about other characteristics of hers. The painful experience is transmitted.

TESTIMONY #28

I am a woman and I am quite tall. When I was a child, everyone kept telling me, especially my family members, who were not so tall: “how much more will you grow”, “stop growing”, as if it were up to me. I felt alienated and different.

TESTIMONY #29

My eyebrows were joined before I started plugging them. I was generally hairier than other girls. Several boys in my class called me “Вежди” (eyebrows). This depressed me a lot. I remember how even my family members started talking to me like that. I felt bad, but in order not to be seen, I began to make fun of myself and turn it into a joke.

TESTIMONY #30

When I was in 5th grade at school, I wore glasses. My classmates loved to make fun of me for being a nerd. The truth was that I enjoyed reading subjects as history, literature, chemistry, and physics because they were interesting to me. However, according to the children in my class, this was boring and almost bad. For the more interesting gatherings in the gardens, drinking beer and smoking, hanging out with students from higher classes. Although at times I felt rejected by my class, I had friends who shared my

interests.

TESTIMONY #31

When I was in seventh grade, I was quite overweight, which is why I was often ridiculed and called a pig. In the breaks, a group of children followed me and grunted. I felt very bad about being ridiculed. I decided that I needed to lose weight to stop it, but in order not to share it with my parents, I made my own decision to eat less. I ate once a day for a month and chewed gum the rest of the time. As a result, at the beginning of the second month, I started to have seizures and had to visit a doctor.

TESTIMONY #32

When I was in eighth grade, I moved to a new school and the kids in the class made fun of me for my size because I was much bigger than my classmates. I was often physically attacked. There were different ways they attacked me. The worst ones were slaps, they put a trash can on my head, they called me Shrek.

TESTIMONY #33

From my childhood until now, all my friends call me Porky.

TESTIMONY #34

I’m a little squint and when I was about 11 I liked a girl. The other boys in the class made fun of me and made me sing her a song with the lyrics “Look me in the eyes ...”. It was supposed to be fun but it wasn’t pleasant at all.

TESTIMONY #35

When I was at the University, a group of girls made fun of me for my body and told me I

looked like a cow. I was fluffy and my name is Milka. My colleagues were making cow sounds and sticking packages of chocolates on the back of my chair.

TESTIMONY #36

I am short. When I was younger, my classmates kept saying behind my back “Where’s Snow White?” and then laughing.

TESTIMONY #37

I have short hair with coloured highlights. Many people around me - acquaintances and strangers, call me “gender” because of this. (In Bulgaria the term “gender” is used as an insult word for people with different sexual orientations).

TESTIMONY #38

I have myopia. I refused to wear glasses for a long time because I didn’t want to be ridiculed by others at school. There were other children who wore glasses and constantly called them in the corridors with different nicknames - “four-eyes”, “cyclops”, “nerds”. Because I had headaches, I had to go to school with glasses, but after a week of ridicule, I stopped. It was years before I calmed down and learned to ignore the insults.

TESTIMONY #39

For some reason, since I was 18-19, I have had a lot of hair on my back, arms, legs and face. My friends regularly call me Chewbacca, and although I don’t show it and even occasionally growl like Chewbacca to laugh, I feel very ashamed inside and secretly want to have hair removal or something.

TESTIMONY #40

I have had a birthmark on my face. They always stared at me. All this staring in my face is very unpleasant. I avoid looking in the mirror because I feel bad and sometimes cry when I look at myself. In my childhood, children were cruel. They told me I was like a monster. At this point in my life, I still feel bad about this stain and I’m really wondering if I should get a tattoo on the stain.



Chapter 5

The body in the performing arts

5.1. A Diverse Stage as a Reflection of and Quest for a Wider Society

The Performing arts industry has been often considered one of the strictest and most demanding markets in terms of physical appearance and body-related prerequisites, notorious for causing a high percentage of mental and physical health related issues among its workers.⁵⁴ This is mostly valid in mass industries, such as classical ballet, commercialized theatre (e.g. Broadway) and popular art stages. The obvious reason is the need for uniformity on stage, especially in ensemble situations, such as the corp de ballet⁵⁵ or choruses in theatre. But this quest for uniformity has also the opposite side, this of exhaustive competitiveness, to others and to the self, as performers strive for perfection, the perfection of their body's image and ability from their training years⁵⁶ into their professional life.

In general, in the years I used to dance I can say that I observed such incidents that affected me, such as girls staring at me, tiny comments, all related to body, to the comparison between thin/ideal for dance and fatter/"you are not suitable for a dancer" [...] something really carved into my mind.

From a young age I was into dance, at 15 I started contemporary dance, until I was 17 I was a member in a competitive group. We rehearsed intensely for a dance competition, but 2 months before the competition our coach announced in front of all the group that I couldn't participate in the competition because my scoliosis didn't allow me to be flexible enough, and that fact ruined the uniformity of the group. Obviously, I felt uncomfortable, but since these words came from a teacher, I considered them absolutely rational. After a week, I quit attending the group and the truth is that I never danced again [...]

⁵⁴ See: Diana Schnitt (1990) Psychological Issues in Dancers—An Overview, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 61:9, 32-34, DOI: [10.1080/07303084.1990.10604624](https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.1990.10604624),

Kylie J. Penniment and Sarah J. Egan. (2012), Perfectionism and learning experiences in dance class as risk factors for eating disorders in dancers. *Eur. Eat. Disorders Rev.*, 20: 13-22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/erv.1089>

Elizabeth McPherson (2015) Viewpoints: A Look at Issues Related to Body Image and Self-Esteem, *Dance Education in Practice*, 1:3, 3-4, DOI: [10.1080/23734833.2015.1068087](https://doi.org/10.1080/23734833.2015.1068087)

⁵⁵ Corp de ballet is the name of the ensemble dancers in a ballet company, who are not stepping out as protagonists, but frame the ballet in the group choreographies. A typical ballet company may employ 20-30 female and the same number of male corp de ballet dancers.

⁵⁶ Jill Green, "Somatic Authority and the Myth of the Ideal Body in Dance Education.", *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1999, pp. 80-100. www.jstor.org/stable/1478333

(testimonies from *Body Shining* survey in Greece)

Another reason is the interdependence of (popular) art and fashion that shape our perceptions of beauty. “Studying photos from theatre or dance productions only some decades ago would immediately remind us how close the performing arts are to style and fashion, the talks of today, the icons, ideals and values of the time’s being. Ofelia on the stage in the 1920s or in the 1990’s – to what extent is she the same person presented to the audience?”⁵⁷ writes the Swedish theatre and dance critic Margarita Sörenson.

While, in our era, the image of a skinny, fragile ballerina, of a female singer with perfect curves and proportions or that of a statue-like symmetrical male actor in Hollywood are the first that comes to mind when we think of performers as they dominate the media, a more attentive look at the arts’ past and present is enough to bring out examples that are brilliant exceptions to this rule.

5.2. Fighting Stereotypical Representation of Male and Female Body on Stage; Challenging Beauty, Strength, Ability and Youth in Dance and Theatre

So, can the arts and the stage act as a carrier of resistance to stereotypes or even as a manifestation of diversity? What can we learn and how could we get inspired by the work of artists –directors, choreographers, dancers, actors, singers- that chose to put on stage bodies out of the expected norms and narrow stereotypes? How a body on stage –being together a presence (actual body and physicality of the performer) and a representation (the characteristics of the role), the signifier and the signified -may challenge any somatic contextualization -gender, race, sexuality, ability, age, beauty and so on?

Historically speaking, stereotypes are valid, but they are rather different across cultures and ages and somehow surprising when we look at them from a contemporary point of view; from big bodied all-male ancient Greek tragedy and Far-East theatre tradition, to the overweight clowns of the Elizabethan theatre⁵⁸, the feminine, rounded looks of the castrati in opera⁵⁹, and the chubby, curved bodies of the early ballerinas of the 19th century, the stage has not always been fat-phobic to the extent we often think today. Actually, big bodies have been in most cultures –and they still are in some - a sign of prosperity and nobleness, in contrast

⁵⁷ Margarita Sörenson, “Femininity and Body Language; Reflections on Pina Bausch and Mats Ek”, *Critical Stages Journal*, vol 3, 2010
<https://www.critical-stages.org/3/femininity-and-body-language-reflections-on-pina-bausch-and-mats-ek/>

⁵⁸ See: Miroslaw Kokur, “Body and Voice Performances in the Elisabethan Theatre”, 2008 <http://kocur.uni.wroc.pl/body-and-voice-performances-in-the-elizabethan-theatre/>

⁵⁹ See: Tony Perrottet’ *Napoleon’s Privates: 2,500 Years of History Unzipped*, HarperCollins, 2008. His online article about the castratti:
<https://www.thesmartset.com/article0806070116/>

with thin, muscular bodies, associated with labour and low social status and the scene only reflected this notion.

“The thin ideal is a characteristic feature of late-modern western societies [...] In societies where the western cultural industry is hegemonic, slenderness became a dominant cultural ideal in the 20th century and is now the reference model to which men and, especially, women usually refer when caring for their bodies”⁶⁰.

You have to work on your body a bit if you want to succeed at something without being rich in our society. [...] My friends still flex their muscles and make me feel uncomfortable when they make their bodily condition so important for them, and when they tell me how much I need the gym to become more handsome.

I have heard the following phrases when I was 120 kilos but also when I was 60 kilos:

-You are very very pretty, but if you were 5 kilos thinner you would be better.

- You are very very smart, but if you were 5 kilos thinner you would be better

-You are very very creative and active, but if you were 5 kilos thinner you would be better

And so on...

(testimonies from Body Shining survey in Greece)

The thin fashion is pushed to the limit in performers' body types, reaching the fit – if not feeble – dancers, actors, singers of the '90 on. The same non-diversity also applies to all body appearance aspects, skin colour, origin, sexual orientation, age, able-bodied-ness; the overwhelming majority of performers in western scene have been white, straight, non-disabled, young. In this text, our intention is not to go further on the stereotypes and the factors that shaped them, but to focus on the work of artists that fought or resisted them. We are going to briefly explore the work of post-modern artists, with an emphasis on dance and dancetheatre, in which some of the most fascinating, meaningful and inspiring examples can be found. This study is not meant to be exhaustive; fortunately, there are uncountable artists whose work can be seen as stereotype-challenging or body-positivity promoting across the globe. We'll refer to only a few of them, from the near past, and then try to highlight a few contemporary initiatives and individuals showing the way to an inclusive art scene.

We can't help but start from the German post-expressionist dance theatre, and specifically the work of two choreographers: Pina Bausch and Mats Ek. Bausch with her company, Wuppertal Tanztheater, has been a pioneer in many aspects, body diversity being only one of them. “One element, as essential as the set and lightning of the stage, is the body expression of the dancers. They are dancers, trained and fit and with different backgrounds as dancers, but deliberately different from each other in opposition to the tradition of classical ballet and

⁶⁰ Paolo Volontè, “The thin ideal and the practice of fashion”, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2019, Vol. 19, 252–270 DOI:

10.1177/1469540517717775

the idea of the dancer as a member of a uniform group. In Wuppertal Tanztheater the idea of “body casting” was realized, combining different looks, heights, body types in a pattern of multitude, stressing the personality and individuality of the dancer.”⁶¹ Asian, Indian and Afro⁶² origin dancers, of various sizes and ages enter her to perform in her pieces, gaining acknowledgment in the dance community, in an era (the ‘70s , ‘80s and ‘90s) they would struggle to enter ‘traditional’ dance companies.

Bausch’s perception of the body –and especially the female body- is closely connected to her gender and feminist approaches. “...Bausch’s Tanztheater examines gender construction and explores the possibility that gender are both expressive and performative”⁶³ as researcher D. W. Price states. Her early work *Kontakthof* (1978) ends with a scene of several men that surround a woman and frantically touch a woman’s body, covering all parts and resulting in her collapsing. It is characteristic that *Kontakthof* has been re-staged in 2000 with men and women aged 65+, and again in 2008 with teenagers 14+, showing her interest in exploring the topic across ages and body conditions. “The variety of ages, nationalities, body types and dispositions is refreshing: These are real people, perhaps a bit cartoonish, and all extraordinary movers, but they make you realize how rare it is to see such physical variety in dance.”⁶⁴ says an American critic when Bausch’s troupe presented *Kontakthof* in Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival. In *Walzer* (1982) there is a sensational scene of a woman in a retro bathing suit shouting a hysteric monologue challenging women’s decent posture, while eating an apple and spitting chunks to the audience and at the same time struggling with ballet exercises. Bausch’s work is still refreshing and inspiring, half a century after she first rocked the boat of the European scene.

Another choreographer that presented a new form of femininity and beauty and put on stage bodies not complying with ballet standards has been Mats Ek. The Swedish choreographer, also affected by German expressionism and the work of Kurt Joos, is well known for his adaptations of classical ballets (*Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Sleeping Beauty*), mixing ballet techniques folk and modern dance elements in psychological approaches of the myths. “Mats Ek wanted to question the aesthetics of ballet and searched for a different kind of beauty, a new and anti-romantic view of men and women in his works.”⁶⁵ His dancers are often dressed and presented in between sexes, while his female protagonists are not at all skinny and fragile, but express a different femininity, based on strength. Ek’s muse, Ana Laguna, shined in her mus-

⁶¹ Sorenson, as above

⁶² In contrast with exclusively black dancers companies, such as Alvin Ailey and Dance Theatre of Harlem.

⁶³ Price, David W. “The Politics of the Body: Pina Bausch’s ‘Tanztheater.’”, *Theatre Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1990, pp. 322–331. www.jstor.org/stable/3208078

⁶⁴ Brian Schaeffer, “Pina Bausch’s epic battle of the sexes”, *Out Magazine*, 2014 <https://www.out.com/entertainment/theater-dance/2014/10/28/pina-bausch-epic-battle-sexes-kontakthof>

⁶⁵ Sorenson, as above

cular, almost masculine silhouette and strong technique. In *Swan Lake* (1987 and 1991 as TV movie) “Ana Laguna’s look is clearly feminine, but opposes the thin, weak and sublime body expression of the romantic sense in her bare feet and robust thighs. This is a living creature in her own rights of love and free will”,⁶⁶ while “... the tutu-clad swans are bald, squatty and awkward”⁶⁷. Such imagery and his kinesiology opposing the harmony, subtleness and aesthetic of ballet, gave Ek the nickname “the choreographer of the ugly”.

This celebration of ‘ugliness’ brings us to the next example, which is the Japanese dance form of Butoh. Tatsumi Hijikata, the founder of the style, has been (not so surprisingly) also initially influenced by German expressionism, the theories of Antonin Artaud and his “Theatre of Cruelty” and the world of French writer Jean Genêt and the Parisian subculture. While his early inspiration has been western, he combined this with traditional Japanese performing arts, the devastating experience of the atomic bomb tragedy and the aesthetic of poor, rural Japan. His dance has firstly shocked his country and the world, by bringing on stage almost nude, skeleton-thin bodies, painted in white, in awkward, unnatural, grotesque and distorted movements and body expressions, before he gained popularity for his new, original dance style that defies definitions and descriptions.⁶⁸ The dancers who gathered around and worked with him, are presented on stage as revolting creatures, often out of gender; Hijikata himself appears in the articulately named piece *Revolting Bodies* (or *Revolution of the Body*) wearing only a golden phallus and later with a bridal kimono. Homosexuality, old age, sickness and pain are often the themes of his work. This representation of old age is not only a thematic; Butoh dancers are known to continue performing until their late years, with Kazuo Ohno, the other emblematic Butoh dancer, giving his last performance at the age of 100, even after having lost his ability to walk.

Ability and disability are the keywords for our next topic. Although there is a separate chapter in this book devoted to able-ism and disabling factors and attitudes, we can’t skip mentioning the valuable inclusive work of individual artists and companies. Disabled bodies in theatre and dance sporadically appeared not earlier than the ‘70s, with the claims of the Disability Arts⁶⁹ movement, starting from the UK and a little later in the US, following the radical political activism of the ‘60’s. In the UK, companies such as Shape Arts (founded 1977), Graeae (1987) and more recently Candoco (1991) made a great difference in the inclusion of disabled artists, through productions that introduced a new aesthetic on stage, enriched

⁶⁶ Sorenson, as above

⁶⁷ Sarah Kaufman, “Mats Ek – the Swedish rebel choreographer who’s ‘allergic to pretty’”, *The Washington Post*, 2016 - https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/mats-ek--the-swedish-rebel-choreographer-whos-allergic-to-pretty/2016/05/27/59f73918-21ef-11e6-aa84-42391ba52c91_story.html

⁶⁸ More about Butoh: Nanako Kurihara. “Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh: [Introduction].” *TDR* (1988-, vol. 44, no. 1, 2000, pp. 12–28. , www.jstor.org/stable/1146810

⁶⁹ More on Disability Arts history: <https://disabilityarts.online/wp-content/up>

with the body and movement diversity of their artists, and new performative possibilities. “ Interestingly, an underlying theme of disability perspectives is that the lived experience of disability is always already performative; indeed, many of us with disabilities understand our disabilities as performance, not exclusively in an aesthetic or theoretical sense, but as an actual mode of living in the world”⁷⁰ writes the disabled artist and scholar Carrie Sandahl. Nabil Shaban, Claire Cunnigham and David Tool in the UK, Lisa Buffano and John Belluso in the USA, are only a few renowned artists that helped establish disability and inclusive art scene, not only as activism and rights’ claim, but as art of high quality and aesthetic value. Claire Cunnigham’s multidisciplinary, with Candoco and as an independent artist, stands out for being totally accessible and stunningly original and engaging at the same time. She has developed a moving style of her own “rooted in the study and use/misuse of her crutches and the exploration of the potential of her own specific physicality with a conscious rejection of traditional dance techniques (developed for non-disabled bodies).”⁷¹ In *Give me a reason to live*, she explored the work of Hieronymus Bosch and portrayed on stage images of the disabled beggars and cripples presented in his paintings. In the masterpiece *The way you look (at me) tonight*, created together with Jess Curtis, the audience is on stage, the performers move among them, setting with their performing “questions about our habits and practices of perceiving each other and the world”⁷².

Candoco company across the years collaborated with many acknowledged choreographers and dancers, disabled and non-disabled, creating a plethora of top-end inclusive dance and dance theatre performances and short films, featuring a vast variety of bodies and their expressive skills. It is worth mentioning that inclusive companies like Candoco started appearing all over the world, creating inclusive spaces and job opportunities for d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodiverse artists, they also attracted those who did not –or were not willing- to fit non-inclusive dance or theatre groups because of their body features (size or unique characteristics). Productions such as *Face In*, *Unlimited Commissions* and *Unspoken Spoken*, are a real kaleidoscope of bodies and bodily expression (and a kick to established perceptions of what a performers’ body is).

Body positivity movement is conquering more and more ground in nowadays performing arts, generally associated with Fat Acceptance movement, Disability Arts movement and LG-BTQ activism. Initiatives such as “Broadway Body Positivity”, “Queer I Art” and “Trans Voices” in the US and “EveryBODY on stage” in Canada, “Big Ballet” in the UK, Faces theatre group in India and many more in various countries, turn more and more the lights to the society’s– and subsequently the arts’ -urgent need to think and grow wider, not any more as ‘tolerant’

⁷⁰ Carrie Sandahl, “From the Streets to the Stage: Disability and the Performing Arts.”, PMLA, vol. 120, no. 2, 2005, pp. 620–624. www.jstor.org/stable/25486196.

⁷¹ From Cunnigham’s official website <https://www.clairecunningham.co.uk/>

⁷² As above

but as valuing and appreciating body diversity. Celebrities like American hip-hop dancer Amanda LaCount, J-Pop group Big Angels and the Japanese comedian Naomi Watanabe help make this need sound louder, gain visibility and reach also popular art, besides the intellectual, avant-garde or scholarly art communities. This issue will for sure continue to concern and affect the performing arts community and industry in the future; until anybody -and any body- can find a place on stage and in every other aspect of social and cultural life, we can't stop re-thinking and re-shaping our perceptions of body, can we?

References

Green J. (1999) "Somatic Authority and the Myth of the Ideal Body in Dance Education" in *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1999, pp. 80–100. www.jstor.org/stable/1478333

Kaufman S. (2016), "Mats Ek – the Swedish rebel choreographer who's 'allergic to pretty'," *The Washington Post*
https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/mats-ek--the-swedish-rebel-choreographer-whos-allergic-to-pretty/2016/05/27/59f73918-21ef-11e6-aa84-42391ba52c91_story.html

Kokur M. (2008), "Body and Voice Performances in the Elisabethan Theatre" <http://kocur.uni.wroc.pl/body-and-voice-performances-in-the-elizabethan-theatre/>

Kurihara N. (2000). "Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh [Introduction]." *TDR* (1988-, vol. 44, no. 1, 2000, pp. 12–28. , www.jstor.org/stable/1146810

McPherson E. (2015) "Viewpoints: A Look at Issues Related to Body Image and Self-Esteem" in *Dance Education in Practice*, 1:3, 3-4, DOI: [10.1080/23734833.2015.1068087](https://doi.org/10.1080/23734833.2015.1068087)

Penniment K. & Egan S. (2012), "Perfectionism and learning experiences in dance class as risk factors for eating disorders in dancers" in *Eur. Eat. Disorders Rev.*, 20: 13-22.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/erv.1089>

Perrottet T. (2008), *Napoleon's Privates: 2,500 Years of History Unzipped*, HarperCollins, 2008. His online article about the castratti: <https://www.thesmartset.com/article0806070116/>

Price D. (1990) "The Politics of the Body: Pina Bausch's 'Tanztheater.'" in *Theatre Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1990, pp. 322–331. www.jstor.org/stable/3208078

Sandahl C.(2005), "From the Streets to the Stage: Disability and the Performing Arts.", *PMLA*, vol. 120, no. 2, 2005, pp. 620–624. www.jstor.org/stable/25486196

Schaeffer B. (2014), "Pina Bausch's epic battle of the sexes", *Out Magazine*, 2014 <https://www.out.com/entertainment/theater-dance/2014/10/28/pina-bausch-epic-battle-sexes-kontakthof>

Schnitt D.(1990)," Psychological Issues in Dancers—An Overview" in *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 61:9, 32-34, DOI: [10.1080/07303084.1990.10604624](https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.1990.10604624)

Sörenson M. (2010), "Femininity and Body Language; Reflections on Pina Bausch and Mats Ek", *Critical Stages Journal*, vol 3, 2010 <https://www.critical-stages.org/3/femininity-and-body-language-reflections-on-pina-bausch-and-mats-ek/>

Volonté P. (2008), "The thin ideal and the practice of fashion", *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2019, Vol. 19, 252–270 DOI: 10.1177/1469540517717775

<https://www.clairecunningham.co.uk/>

<https://disabilityarts.online/wp-content/up>

Further reading/ articles

<https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/body-shamed-two-thirds-of-actors-told-to-change-their-appearance-for-work-survey-reveals>

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/feb/18/arts-bodies-threatened-with-funding-cuts-over-lack-of-diversity>

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2021-05-15/broadway-body-theater-fatphobia>

<https://www.kpopstarz.com/articles/294107/20200729/these-k-pop-idols-experienced-fat-shaming-and-humiliation-from-the-public.htm>

<https://thetheatretimes.com/a-street-play-that-conveyed-hard-hitting-messages-on-body-shaming/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/arts/david-toole-disabled-dancer-with-grace-in-his-hands-dies-at-56.html>

<https://harvardpolitics.com/disabilities-in-performing-arts/>

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/82151419.pdf>

<https://usefultravelarticles.com/6151-valery-mikhailovsky-s-saint-petersburg-male-ballet-description-and-photo-russia-saint-petersburg-saint-petersburg.html>

Videos

Walzer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrdwjlgakNO>

Unlimited Commissions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Utpg6A5fnWo>

David Tool: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP9ynfw-Ytl>

Amanda LaCount: <https://www.amandalacount.com/videos>

Workshop held in Larissa, Greece



Testimonies

collected in Greece



TESTIMONY #1

I have a big scoliosis (40 degrees in the bottom of my spine and 60 degrees in the top). Even spending years wearing a special orthopedic brace and doing exercise, there was no satisfactory improvement. It is still hard for me to feel totally well in tight T-shirts or swimming suits. My testimony is directly linked to this 'dysplasia' of my body.

From a young age I was into dance, in my 15 I started contemporary dance, until my 17 I was a member in a competitive group. We rehearsed intensely for a dance competition, but 2 months before the competition our coach announced in front of all the group that I couldn't participate in the competition because my scoliosis didn't allow me to be flexible enough, and that fact ruined the uniformity of the group. Obviously I felt uncomfortable, but since these words came from a teacher, I considered them absolutely rational. After a week, I quit attending the group and the truth is that I never danced again, maybe due to that specific comment, combined with a heavy schedule in that period... 7 years later, I realise now how anti-pedagogical and also invalid was that teacher's comment. If my problem was my scoliosis, I wouldn't have entered the competitive group; moreover, all the previous years I was dancing, I never faced a problem in my moves and no other teacher commented so. The fact is that such a comment in the Arts field is going further that the individual concerns of the person receiving it, and it expands

to a rationale that people with a different body (whether it is over- or under- weight, or a body malformation) are not accepted in the professional or competitive field. I still haven't figured out exactly the root and the rationale behind that comment and I am not interested to know any more...

In the past I was embarrassed to tell this story, now I feel I want to share it, to hear it myself again to demythologise all the sentiments of fear and embarrassment created at that time. (*Woman, 22*)

TESTIMONY #2

From a young age I have studied ballet. I adored it! I knew I was not as good as the other girls, but I loved it so much I didn't care. When I reached Junior High School, I had a different female teacher than the one I used to. I knew she was really strict. One day I asked her: "Ma'm, how can I improve my feet arch?" And she answered me, in front of all the other students: "Your arch, my girl? If you go to a dance academy with these thighs, they will kick you out. It's not about your arch".

I never understood why she didn't focus on the fact that I wanted to improve something, but she chose to negatively comment on my body.

My co-student of course said nothing, neither did I. We were in a sensitive age, where all these have been imprinted in us- and we accepted them. Because I really recall that throughout my puberty, the part of my body I felt more insecure about were my thighs. Probably this insecurity derived from that experience.

In general, in the years I used to dance I can say that I observed such incidents that

affected me, such as girls staring at me, tiny comments, all related to body, to the comparison between thin/ideal for dance and fatter/"you are not suitable for a dancer". But this situation I mentioned before is something really carved into my mind. (*Woman, 23*)

TESTIMONY #3

We were in a bus coming back from school and a boy –a very social and popular one– came close to me, asked me to put off my headphones and told me in a loud voice (all kids next to us heard him) the following: "F*ck, you have so small tits, how can you? how can it be possible?" I remember that I laughed, obviously feeling awkward, and didn't continue it. I still remember that day really vividly, I remember what exactly I was wearing, My seat in the bus and how I returned home. I entered my room and started to stare at my breast and cry. From that day on and for at least a year I used to go in front of the mirror and look at my breast, to check somehow if it had grown any bigger.

This experience doesn't make me sad any more, because I realised how problematic and immature that person was. I am calm now that I share it, with a slight feeling of anger about how a relatively "simple" experience like this can affect a person, especially an adolescent girl whose body is 100% sexualised by her classmates. (*Woman, 22*)

TESTIMONY #4

My mom pinched my arm and told me with a smile and a happy voice "Aah, you put on some weight, don't you?" I just looked at her. She got pissed just from my look and she asked me "Why are you looking at me like

that?" I said "Is it a nice question? Would you ever ask a stranger a question like this/" And she said "I'm not a stranger, I'm your mother. If I don't tell you, who's going to tell you? I tell you so that you are not becoming like me." My father was there too, not participating verbally. I had enough of her burdening me with her unconscious insecurities. She tries to control my body with comments like "for your sake" because she never was able to control hers. (*Woman, 24*)

TESTIMONY #5

My classmates in elementary school used to call me "toothpick" all the time because I was very thin. This happened during the breaks or in the gym class when we played several sports. Of course in my whole life I keep on hearing negative comments for my weight, especially by older people of my family environment, who think I'm not woman enough and that I will not be liked by the opposite sex because I'm skinny.

I think this judgement about my weight is gender related, since I never remember making fun of thin boys as something negative. In the whole adult life the correlation between body weight and popularity to the opposite sex is mainly commented about women (*Woman, 30*)

TESTIMONY #6

During my adolescence, family members often commented on my thighs, that they were fat and full of cellulite. Other family members witnessed those comments. I can recall several incidents, it makes me think that those comments have affected my current body image. (*Woman, 27*)

TESTIMONY #7

Due to my involvement in sports, from a very young age I had a big muscular development, a fact that made me stand out from other kids my age. One year at a campground (I was 11) I noticed that all the kids were looking at me and pointing at me, and then when they met in places other than the beach they asked me if I was this grll with the abs. I want to note that nobody did that with a bad intention but at that age I was unable to manage it, resulting in me being embarrassed to go to the beach or show my body. (*Woman, 23*)

TESTIMONY #8

Parents and other people asking me “How have you become like this?” or “Can YOU wear this?” (*Woman, 30*)

TESTIMONY #9

It was a girl, back in 2011, she commented on my belly. There were witnesses around, we were at the school yard playing... (*Woman, 22*)

TESTIMONY #10

Comments on how thin I was... My body is quite thin, so if I put on some weight it would be ok for the stereotypes of sexyness. (*Woman, 28*)

TESTIMONY #11

Some elements that may have contributed to the small portions of body shaming that I have received were that I have been a good student, a kind kid and I usually had different interests than my peers.

I never received a clear and flashy body shaming. If it happened sometimes, it has

been mainly general and humoristic... but it definitely was uncomfortable and inappropriate. It was usually from people my age or my brother, not for a particular part of my body and not often or strong.

But there have been characterisations for the period I was a bit chubby, that were not at all funny to me.

Any incidents usually happened during some kind of exercise or activity (despite the fact that I always exercised) or in cases I wore a cloth that didn't flutter me.

There were comments like “You put on weight, mountain, meatball, I can see your chest, I can see your butt, But you are not exercising? Do you have stamina? You have to pay attention, You need a diet...” (*Man, 23*)

TESTIMONY #12

Comments on my growth and my curves (or my non existing body curves). The time frame was definitely my school years. Now, from random people, advice or remarks, an informal “must”. My answers condense several incidents and it's hard for me to communicate how I felt in each case. I also feel strong because this process reminded me what I overcame, how I am and how I feel NOW about myself. Thank you. (*other gender, 30*)

TESTIMONY #13

Before my body abruptly gained weight, I always had a lean body. Suddenly this changed and many people commented on this change, escorting their comments with an intense gaze in several parts of my body. I was embarrassed and angry, and as a result, I turned to food as a reaction. (*Woman, 28*)

TESTIMONY #14

In elementary school my classmates commented on my weight, saying that I was fat in front of my teacher. My teacher, in front of all our class, spoke about acceptance and respect.

I felt really bad, I was very embarrassed.

From that moment on, I was trying to wear loose clothes to hide my body. This fact stayed with me later on. (*Woman, 22*)

TESTIMONY #15

Classmates at elementary school commented on my height. There were witnesses, but nobody reacted. (*Woman, 21*)

TESTIMONY #16

We know that these things usually start with an indiscrete suggestion, like “lose some kilos and you’ll see, you’ll be more beautiful, I’m saying this for your sake”. Somehow like this started also this incident that day, in a cafe among female and male friends. A friend of a friend thought that he had the right to interfere in my bodily state and to express his opinions. Of course there have been witnesses. Others of the company, who just kept silent, like silently giving their approval in this body shaming. At first I felt embarrassed. That this thing was mentioned in front of all those people. But then I got angry that nobody explained to this kid that he had no right to criticise me, that he was not affected by that and it was not his business. I told him this kindly and I left.

There are no other elements that affected that incident. The fact that I was a plus size girl, not fitting my friends’ image, was enough.

I felt really good to have finally shared an

incident that affected me at that time but I had never discussed it. I kept it inside me, because I was feeling embarrassed about that, while it shouldn’t be me the one to feel embarrassed. (*Woman, 23*)

TESTIMONY #17

“You put on weight”. By relatives and friends. In random occasions. (*Man, 29*)

TESTIMONY #18

About my height, my weight, I’m not sure about witnesses, probably there have been some. The deepest problem I think is that the victims themselves inwardly recognize that their body is not “correct” and this is sad because it reflects how stereotypes have been unconsciously set also to people having non conventionally beautiful bodies. It’s like a first body shaming to us by ourselves. (*Woman, 30*)

TESTIMONY #19

It was done by boys from the group of friends I belonged to. I was 13. Comments concerned my weight without focusing on specific body parts. (*Woman, 25*)

TESTIMONY #20

It was about my body, in my school environment in general, in front of classmates, telling me things that made me sad, but for them it was in the framework of joking. I never had the strength to tell them that it was annoying to me this kind of joking, because I considered them as friends, no matter how bad I felt. (*Woman, 22*)

TESTIMONY #21

The form of body shaming was about my

body weight, for my eyelid's fall and for the way I was dressing. When I was at Junior high 3rd grade, my classmates used to comment on my clothes and my excess kilos. When I went to study, I was commuting by bus, and one day a kid stared at me and made some weird movements with his hands around his eye. (*Woman, 24*)

TESTIMONY #22

It was a verbal body shaming by a friend-relative concerning my weight increase. It took place 3 years ago, I was 22 at that time, in the middle of a treatment including hormones that increase the weight, resulting in me gaining 15 kilos. It happened with the rest of the friends present. Comments such as "How have you become like this?", "I'm not taking you out like this", "Lose some kilos or you are not going to fit in your clothes soon", "You put on weight, you suck in photos". Note that all the company agreed on the comments and reinforced the opinion of the friend that started that. (*Woman, 25*)

TESTIMONY #23

A boy insulted me about a birthmark, in front of other people. I was 16. (*Woman, 22*)

TESTIMONY #24

I have very curly hair, in Junior High my classmates called me cauleslow, pineapple and other names.

Now I believe in me, I don't care, I have learned how to answer when somebody targets me. (*Woman, 30*)

TESTIMONY #25

Comments "for my shake" most of the times. From men or women of my environment for

my whole body. People haven't understood that body shaming is not only addressed to people with excess kilos. If you say to somebody "eat some food, you have remained half!" it's body shaming. If you tell someone "Your butt is not existing!", it's body shaming! If you tell someone "Your dick is small", it's body shaming. (*Woman, 22*)

TESTIMONY #26

Bullying from my social environment and peers. No witnesses. It was more like a constant existence of mental violence and humiliation because of the overall shape of my body, because of excess weight and inability to look like other people in my environment. It was a situation I experienced and I managed to overcome. (*Man, 23*)

TESTIMONY #27

I don't remember having experienced a coarse body shaming from other people, sure, sometimes about my height (I'm quite short), especially in a younger age, but I keep on receiving body shaming for my 2-3-4 extra kilos by my own mother. She from her side this is how she knows to act and tries to tell me to pay attention not to get fat, that I am a young lady and I have to be beautiful, with a nice body and not to become like her, that she's doing it for "my shake", but this doesn't mean it's not body shaming, and a repeated one, really imprinted on me.

For sure social class plays a role in that, being in the middle class. If I didn't have enough to eat, maybe (I don't know) I wouldn't have a reason to think so much about my extra kilos, maybe I wouldn't have the possibility to have a full fridge to always have food available. If I had been super rich, I could afford to go to

the gym and take care of my metabolism and my diet, maybe more excessively than now. Moreover, for sure my physical and mental ability plays a role. I much enjoy exercising, especially one kind of sports, I have seen my body how it is after a long period of exercising, and I feel it is healthier and more functional, it also helps me with a gynaecological condition I have when combined with diet. As I mentioned, the more characteristic body shaming is that by my mother. Obviously there are witnesses, my father, my brother, most of the time they will agree with my mother or they will take it as a joke, they will make a little joke about my weight, they will comment on my thighs, my cheeks and so on. I feel strange (not in a negative way) to realise that the most outstanding example of body shaming comes from my own little house.

Maybe I got used to it all these years. Now I can laugh too with the comments. I love my body, sure sometimes I feel uncomfortable with my extra kilos, but since it's not sooooo many kilos, I relax and think we have a mediterranean body, what can we do? Sometimes I train it and I'm fit, some other times I will leave it to "rotten" and then again from the start. I struggle to keep it to a level satisfactory to me, but I'll not get crazy. *(Woman, 26)*

TESTIMONY #28

About my girth and thighs, by my classmates, a little bit in elementary school and in Junior High. *(Woman, 22)*

TESTIMONY #29

Bullying because I was overweight... generally about how I look... From my classmates during the whole elementary school until

Junior High school, when a boy threw me down the stairs to see if an earthquake would happen.... There have been witnesses every time, both children and teachers, but they did absolutely nothing.

Now it doesn't bother me at all, because I am aware of what I have experienced, in general it made me good, so it's good to speak out these testimonies for kids nowadays, to give them strength and not to believe they are alone... *(Woman, 25)*

TESTIMONY #30

Comments about my body weight, belly and chest. Felt bad saying it. *(Man, 25)*

TESTIMONY #31

It's about my skin colour. In my everyday life, there are people that keep on commenting how white my skin is. Characterisations such as "a fly in milk" is something I often come across. About how I felt sharing it: We are building a better tomorrow step by step! *(Woman, 22)*

TESTIMONY #32

Comments about my whole body, that I am allegedly too thin in comparison to others. How can you stay standing up and not fall down? *(Man, 22)*

TESTIMONY #33

About my physical ability, my face characteristics, myopia, by people of the same age, mainly at elementary school and junior high, inside and outside of the school environment. Now it's just an issue I've left behind. We all have special bodies and characteristics, and we should not let anybody make us feel bad about them. *(Woman, 26)*

TESTIMONY #34

About my body in general, because I had excess kilos, I have heard various comments from a female friend of mine, it was at school.

(Woman, 21)

TESTIMONY #35

“What a juicy thigh” was the comment of a guy that passed by me on his bike, while I was waiting at the bus stop to go to college. It was one of the first hot summer days, and that’s why I had put on shorts. There were many people there, I was together with my friends, however we were just shocked and didn;t have the time to say something. I think quite a lot about this incident when I put on shorts in early summers. *(Woman, 21)*

TESTIMONY #36

I remember the first summer that I had put on weight abruptly, I was 7, playing on the beach, when my father commented how my belly came to suit really well to my whole family. The truth is that body shaming is a topic that makes me feel uncomfortable, since all my life I face problems with my body and struggle with eating disorders. But it’s part of my healing to talk about that and to read things related to that. *(Woman, 23)*

TESTIMONY #37

Endless comments about how much weight I lose and that I suck and that I must eat, mainly by men, that men don’t like women like this. While at the same time I was afraid I would die.... Depression... I have been on the borders of anorexia nervosa twice. *(Woman, 27)*

TESTIMONY #38

Many incidents, from body shaming I received by female friends and parents “in order to be able to find a man, because if you are fat, you won’t” to doctors who, even when my medical tests have been perfect, they blamed my weight for all. I’m speaking about 15-20 kilos in excess. At first I felt embarrassment, sorrow, hatred about myself, but since I belong to the wider feminist activist movement I received a lot of empowerment and support from companionship, so I slowly started to step on my feet. *(Woman, 30)*

TESTIMONY #39

I have hormone issues. I always had extra kilos and my body is not skinny. This fact, according to others, didn’t allow me to be good enough. I have heard the following phrases when I was 120 kilos but also when I was 60 kilos:

- You are very very pretty, but if you were 5 kilos thinner you would be better.
- You are very very smart, but if you were 5 kilos thinner you would be better
- You are very very creative and active, but if you were 5 kilos thinner you would be better, and so on.

I felt liberated sharing this. I haven’t realised that I have normalised this phrase. The fact that I have 5,10,15 kilos in excess doesn’t mean that without them I am better. On the contrary! I am better just how I am: MYSELF! *(Woman, 26)*

TESTIMONY #40

I have received some comments about my body hair. Mainly at school. From a boy (maybe there were 2 more persons together)

about the hair on my legs that were visible at the edge of my jeans. (*Woman, 22*)

TESTIMONY #41

Financially, I'm middle status. You have to work on your body a bit if you want to succeed at something without being rich in our society. Belly, single-eyebrow, characteristics such as poop, ugly, etc at school and in the army. From my father comments like you have to loose weight. My friends still flex their muscles and make me feel uncomfortable when they make their bodily condition so important for them, and when they tell me how much I need the gym to become more handsome. I felt fine sharing it. It's somehow like it has been taken out of me, we need it once in a while. (*Man, 23*)



Thank you for reading the whole document.

If you want to know more about the project, explore more here:

- Website: www.bodyshining.eu
 - Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/bodyshining.eu/>
-

Explore the partners around Europe

