



“I am Too Wide for Your Narrow Mind”: Drawing on Experiences of Overweight and Obese Filipino Adults on Fat Shaming

Roberto Prudencio D. Abello, M.D., MHSS

Behavioral Sciences Department

De La Salle University-Manila

roberto-prudencio-abello@dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract: From a phenomenological viewpoint, fat shaming as lived experiences and encounters among overweight and obese Filipino adults have been incorporated into gaze and voice of others. The spontaneous and unselected flinging of ridicule, mockery, fat jokes, and meaningful and funny gaze among plus size adults become a product of symbolic interaction. These experiences are internalized and sometimes becomes bodily perceived; becomes a ‘body-for-others’ because other people would eventually covertly control the stigmatized fat person. In fact, this paper revealed the experiences of selected overweight and obese Filipino adults using the social media, life narratives and visual arts to demonstrate, describe and express this phenomenon in contemporary Filipino setting. The research was limited mainly on the purposive identification of respondents using a criterion and commitment of the respondents until the final stretch of the study. Ethical considerations and respect were accorded to the participants with regards the confidentiality and authenticity of their experiences. This study is a descriptive, interpretive and phenomenological exercise. The theoretical insights were extracted from symbolic interactionism, social theory of the body, Goffman’s theory of stigma and theory of labeling. Likewise, the study attempted to define the special gap between the ideal body form and actual social identity of a fat body in the lens of fat shaming as lived experiences of overweight and obese adults. The participants who feels inadequate to describe their fat shaming experience was treated with epistemological landscape of drawing perceptions through art. Immersive experience was extracted from their life vignettes and transformed into artwork. Finally, the study revealed that overweight and obese Filipino adults were found to have similar experiences to their global counterparts. These fat shaming experiences were mirrored by society and displayed in varied ways, e.g. humor, rejection, invisibility, disembodiment, internalization, and family pressure. In conclusion, the researcher has given an avenue to the participants how to express their fat shaming experience through discourse and artwork.

Key Words: overweight and obese Filipino adults, fat body, fat shaming, lived experience, immersive experience through artwork, invisibility, internalization.



Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

INTRODUCTION :

This paper examined the context of fat shaming among Filipino overweight and obese adults. Fat shaming though prevalent globally, developed countries has embarked most social research on the impact of fat shaming mostly in the social media. Among countries in Asia social research about this social issue much of recorded experiences and accounts were documented and discussed through personal blogsites that became a venue to express, advocate and explain impact and importance of fat shaming in contemporary time. In contemporary Philippine setting, it was found to depict fat shaming experiences through personal blogsites and other forms of social media. The blogsites are likely to address the impact of fat shaming as an emotional expression among those affected by this stigmatization. Discourse on fat shaming in the Philippines albeit culturally founded and rather emotional, this academic paper would likely to describe the experiences of adult Filipinos exposed to social phenomenon. Inadequate research and studies on fat shaming in the Filipino context has prompted this academic pursuit. This paper assumed that fat shaming has many forms, e.g. anti-fat attitude, anti-fat prejudice, weight bias, obesity stigma which are directed to humiliate and censure a “fat” person.

The contemporary Filipino setting is both harsh and humorous toward individuals labeled as “fat” and in local parlance, *“tabachoy”* that would suggest that fat shaming culture exists in the Philippine society. These can be historically reviewed with movies and comics strips hilariously depicting how the public treats overweight and obese adults and teenagers alike. The cinematic portrayal in the Philippine movies of Ike Lozada as *“Bonjing,”* Cecile Inigo as *“Diabiana,”* the emergence of various beauty contests stage popular noon-time variety shows featuring “fat” women who were beautiful and talented and at present the emergence of reality shows on how to these fat people struggle to lose weight. All these showcased how the public would regard individuals who have excess weight. The traditional narratives about fat shaming as shared through anecdotal and advice columns in print media as well as experiential narratives in the personal blogsites, blog diaries and journals and *“Biggest Loser Weight Loss*

Challenge” has shaped the context of what it is to be fat conquering the struggles to attain the ideal body form. These experiences have various connotations and nuances; notwithstanding these experiences have strong exhortation and the increasing demands among adults who have received associated negative outcomes with them being “fat” through fat shaming.

In order to expand consideration of what fat shaming means to be literally fat. This paper is most interested in the questions of why. It is, however, arguable that it important to focus not only on popular cultural messages about fatness or the stigma surrounding fat persons but also the physicality of fat embodiment. While popular cultural messages and public policies concerning fatness are vital threads in the tapestry of fat experiences (Owen, 2012), there should be a clear presentation of the physical, tangible, somatic realities of fat bodies moving through space and time in which enveloped in the realm of stigmatization specifically fat shaming. To ignore the physical components of fat experiences is to validate the invisibility of the very bodies (Guthman, 2009; Goffman, 1963) that provide us with the sensory information required to make sense of the world. These fat bodies are indeed contexts and visuals that be defined by the person’s lived experiences as they lived and breathed with these experiences. These are overlapping realities that understanding fat shaming has been unfortunately sparse. In other words, although some of us may pretend it is so, fat persons are not “brains” in jars, and our experiences with the world are not merely intellectual ones but they are living experiences.

The social issue is interesting, important and relevant to the contemporary time; primarily because of health risk accorded to being overweight and obese. The Filipino context on fat shaming and general well-being wants to create an indulgent society toward overweight and obese individuals that they should be given respect and understanding because there are a lot of reasons why they have been in such dilemma of being a “fat” individual. This paper presents a Filipino context and thorough understanding of fat shaming and attempted to present the phenomenon a



Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

concrete elucidation of what it is all about through visual sociology by the respondents drawing analysis of their experiences that they cannot express in words.

MAIN CLAIMS

It has been observed that one of the most reflective biological change for Filipino adults is the consistent rise in the average body mass in the last several decades. Culturally, individuals affected by this phenomenon experience fat shaming. As a form of stigma, it stems from a notion that the fat body as unsightly and repellent. The fat body incites ridicule, derision, teasing, loathing to shame an individual and a strong attention getter (Lupton, 2012). What it feels to be fat is countering dominant notions of the healthy body (McClure, Puhl & Heuer, 2011; Lawrence, 2004). The focus on the body size has stirred the concern and anti-obesity positions as the human body undergoes transformation.

Farrell (2011) argues that fat shaming in the form of derision, humor and labeling and stigma associated with a fat body is culturally connected and has preceded largely on health concerns but somehow misplaced criticism albeit resulting from personal interaction. Moreover, it became an issue by the time diet industry began to flourish in the 1920s (Farrell, 2011, p. 35) and development of fat stigma was related not only to cultural anxieties that emerged during the modern period related to consumer excess (Anderson-Faye & Brewis, 2016). However, fat shaming can be profoundly related to prevailing ideas about race, civilization and evolution and it changes through time (Lupton, 2012; Puhl & Heuer, 2009). These are evidently depicted in wide array of sources such as political cartoons, popular comic strips, postcards, advertisements, physicians' manuals and health campaigns, to explore the link between history mocking of fatness and contemporary concern over obesity (Farrell, 2011, p. 117-119).

Fat shaming was profoundly prevailing experience and encounter in the family (Hancock,

2015; Rich & Evans, 2005). The dominance of colonial mindset disseminated fat shaming ingrained in the Filipino family. These colonial influences have dictated on society's standard of body form and beauty (Agoncillo, 1990, p. 28-29) as Filipino families would encourage their children to follow the body desired. Any teenage girl and boy who grew up in a Filipino household knows a thing or two about being body shamed by family members or relatives. Whether it's being called names (*taba*, *payatot*) or getting called out for your size or shape ("*ang laki laki mo na*," "*para ka nang toothpick*"), our parents, *titos* and *titas*, and *lolos* and *lolas* have contributed to it in one way or another. It's not that they hate us or deliberately want us to feel bad about ourselves. It's just that it's sadly become part of our culture. The family conversation creates a disparity of opinions and perception which unfortunately becomes normative for family members and the society to comment on other people's physical appearances, good or bad.

A belief that teasing is something to be endured as a natural element of childhood and adolescence may lead people to conclude that, as adults, the experiences become relegated to the past and the name-calling and taunting are safely forgotten. It is but common that the human brain is trained to always described and comment on what is not ideal to the human perception (Goffman, 1963). However, the residual effects of teasing on one's self-esteem and body image may be more prevalent than might be assumed. Fat shaming may continue to impact and influence perceptions of body and self of the childhood teasing recipients well into adulthood. Fat shaming is a product of human interaction and the influence of colonial influence and associated with the cultural background of those perceiving the deviation from the ideal body form.

The extent of understanding fat shaming emphasizes the importance of the cultural context of fat stigma and how the body form changes the context of time. The theory of labeling comes into picture when the fat shamed individual is exposed to other people and interacts with them. Subsequently, fat shaming experience is a product



Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

of symbolic interaction. The cultural equation becomes complete as “fat equals bad,” pointing out that weight shaming and associating fatness whatever the message is program in the human brain and promotes discrimination and stereotyping of fat people. These would impact almost every aspect of an overweight individual’s life, from, childhood bullying to fewer academic, romantic, and career opportunities as an adult.

As Puhl & Heuer (2009) stresses that for 19th and 20th century thinkers, fatness was a key marker of inferiority, of an uncivilized and primitive body that endures today, fueling on cultural distress over obesity epidemic and objectified as a social and interpersonal symbol of stigma to conform to the ideal body form which is basically connected to colonial influence. The family becomes the distasteful venue of fat shaming (. Thus, the fat body has been transformed into various presentation (e.g. media, public health campaigns, food and beverage advertisement). Consequently, family members would make small talk and make something to laugh during small conversations that would slight the “fat” family member. Specifically, family members would fat shame a family in varied forms, that is, using funny looks usually among the females who wear something fitted and exposing the belly. Fat shaming can hurt. Indeed, teasing during childhood and adolescence may be regard as a product of human interaction and the influence of colonial influence and associated with the cultural background of those perceiving the deviation from the ideal body form.

The extent of understanding fat shaming emphasizes the importance of the cultural context of fat stigma and how the body form changes the context of time. The theory of labeling comes into picture when the fat shamed individual is exposed to other people and interacts with them. Subsequently, fat shaming experience is a product of symbolic interaction. The cultural equation becomes complete as “fat equals bad,” pointing out that weight shaming and associating fatness

whatever the message is program in the human brain and promotes discrimination and stereotyping of fat people. These would impact almost every aspect of an overweight individual’s life, from, childhood bullying to fewer academic, romantic, and career opportunities as an adult.

A belief that teasing is something to be endured as a natural element of childhood and adolescence may lead people to conclude that, as adults, the experiences become relegated to the past and the name-calling and taunting are safely forgotten. However, the residual effects of teasing on one’s self-esteem and body image may be more prevalent than might be assumed. Fat shaming may continue to impact and influence perceptions of body and self of the childhood teasing recipients well into adulthood.

The emotional suffering from stigma can exceed all other aspects of the self and identity (Goffman, 1963). The context of fat shaming becomes an established entity that the community perceived as an image of humor and derision. The fat body becomes a symbol of interaction and how fat shaming can now impact other stigmas such as poverty, economic status and healthy food option. Fat shaming becomes an interactive discourse between the family members and society because as a form of stigma is developed through interaction with other people. The stigmatization becomes experiential that it is not ideal rather unique, and it could change through time. Moreover, fat shaming becomes a reality in the course of time and colonial influence bringing to a notion that the ideal body form is changing and fat shaming could be change through people’s interaction with each other. The changing body form and that also includes beauty is evolving in the course of time and history. It is overbearing to think that fat shaming is not rooted in the interaction of people because to be fat shame you must experience how people would label your body in the course of human interaction.



Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

METHODOLOGY

There are three overlapping methods utilized in this paper: thematic analysis, interviewing through using the *Facebook Messenger*, and drawing analysis. The researcher publicly solicited self-identified 'large' or 'plus-sized' persons, regardless of their politics around their body size, others were recruited through referral from friends and colleagues. Some respondents opted to discuss their fat shaming experiences in the *FB closed group account*; several chose to share their journals which they have maintained for the past 6 months; and a few opened their private, diary-like entries and publicly as blog posts, for at least one day to several weeks. Initially 58 members volunteered to be members of the closed group (45 women and 13 men).

The respondents grossly satisfied the inclusion criteria as member of the closed group: (1) have experienced fat shaming for the past six months; (2) aged 18 and 55 years; (3) have tried to maintain journals and personal diaries; (4) in a period of 6 months they have tried to lose weight. The researcher acts as facilitator and non-participant observer (i.e. open and generally unsystematic observation on social media setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 181) was utilized to be more sensitized to the respondents and interaction as the researcher is also an overweight individual not to be biased to the flow of the interaction.

In a period of three months only 16 (12 women and 4 men) committed themselves and consistently shared and discussed their fat shaming experiences on the closed group accounts. These sixteen respondents were interviewed via *FB Messenger Voice Chat*. There are twenty (20) respondents who officially backed out of the *FB* closed group. Only 16 respondents were included in the thematic analysis for the purpose of this study. The researcher tried to fill this sex gap by aggressively pursuing men interviewees, but

women still vastly outnumbered them. Unfortunately, my analyses reflect this lack of male voices.

Finally, *FB Messenger Voice Chat* interviews was conducted on 6 women and 2 men. The six participants were interviewed using an interview schedule containing three questions in general. The interview covered generally the research questions because of time constraint. The fat shaming experiences were complicated, three women were not comfortable to be interviewed and they were offered another method- Visual Sociology (drawing their lived experiences). Because "when we do not have words to say something, drawing can define the real and unreal in visual terms (Kovats, 2007: p. 8). Through drawing and sketching, a person can express their fat shaming experiences which become a conception of relationship between acts of consciousness of being overweight or obese as an "object for systematic analysis and reflection" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004) and a symbolic representation of fat shaming.

FINDINGS

The researcher used a thematic analysis approach to classify and analyze the rich information gained from these multiple qualitative methods. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 79), "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data." The lived experiences recounted by the respondents are important such as their daily experiences, intrapersonal and interpersonal alike, of living fatness. Journals and interviews allowed me insights into individuals' interiorities, *FB* closed group discourse revealed the social aspect of fat shaming. These experiences provided the researcher with information on the interpersonal and societal natures of fat shaming.

The findings considered the core themes that emerged from the video chat interviews. The



Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

core themes that emerged are the following: ***family pressure, invisibility, disembodiment, rejection, changing body image, and internalization.*** The categories extracted are quite emotional and highly reactional. Other findings included identity transformation and changed lifestyle following fat shaming. The participants reported that they are largely influenced by their fat shaming experiences such, i.e. self-esteem, attractiveness and enhancing their large body. All sixteen participants referred to a long-lasting hurt and majority of the women appeared to be disgusted of ridicule and derision they received. The male participants revealed that their fat shaming was taken transitory except one that really made a remarkable change of his lifestyle.

Since the participants come from various ages with mean age of 32 years (55 years as oldest and 18 years the youngest), majority are based in Manila due to their respective jobs and studies. Majority of the participants were women. The researcher is fully aware that these women have a lot of stories to reveal and assumes the women perspective of fat shaming will surface and highlighted from the themes. This would make sense since many women have experienced fat shaming in their lifetime. These lived experiences identify their struggles in their large body form specifically, plus sized body as euphemism for women living large in a size medium world (Owen, 2008). Many of the participants would conceal their bad experiences because they range from awkward to humiliating. Several participants have reservations in disclosing their experiences because they would recall painful events. The researcher encouraged them to describe them through through visual representation. Thus, the researcher painted with a broad brush some of their everyday fat shaming experiences, including their coping strategies by describing these experiences through artwork.

Fat shaming experiences among the 16 respondents was extracted based on the following research questions: (1) How would you describe

your experiences on fat shaming being as an overweight and obese individual? (2) To what extent these fat shaming experiences has affected you in your daily interaction with other people? and (3) How are you able to manage the challenges of fat shaming in your everyday life?

The interviews are a profound experience, not only because they provide insights into enormous significance because as the researcher is a fat individual and my participants' existence as 'large' persons influenced the way common ground and mutual understanding was sought. Subsequently, the participants would not feel alienation and make them feel a sense of belonging from our physical worlds. As a result, an awareness of interpersonal exchanges between the researcher and participants was established and became a plus factor to extract more lived experiences.

The family has become the source of fat shaming as revealed by the 16 participants' lived experiences. the focus on the body size has become strengthened and stirred within the family circle. These become a venue of teasing, impertinent talks and even 'trash talking' that would make the overweight and obese person excluded and marginalized. The prevalence of fat shaming in the Filipino family is cultural and as maybe in Western countries Farrell (2011). According to Plummer (1979), 'the family becomes the source of misunderstood labeling' which means family members are aware of their overweight sibling, many of family members and relatives yet they keep on repeating the sequence of misbehavior. Moreover, Owen (2012), specifically referred fat shaming in the family a spatial discrimination, i.e. the plus sized person occupies more space in the dining table and makes them difficult to be fitted in family gatherings. Here are some vignettes of the participants on family pressure as a theme of fat shaming:

Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

Family Pressure

Peachy, 42, teacher, single mother revealed: *“My siblings are very discriminating become apathetic. **‘Walang araw ginawa ng Diyos na hindi ako insultuhin, na mataba ako, kaya iniwan ng asawa kasi pabaya ako’** sabi ko naman? What is the connection of being overweight in our turbulent marriage? My fat shaming experience has gone to it’s limit and becomes political. It irritates me that my family members are picking on me. I often talk to myself, **‘pwede ba? Mawala na kayo!** They engage my being overweight and my family life in small talk and laugh about it during their conversations, I felt being bullied.”*

As Anne, 18-year-old, freshmen student revealed in her live chat interview: *“I was judge by my parents and sibling in relations to the **space I occupy in the room**- are chairs set too close? Can I move them? How low is the seating? Will you be able to get back up? When I am sitting down, I try to draw my body in as much as possible so that I do not flow into what is deemed my siblings’ space. I tried to **become hyperconscious of all the time** and I would imagine myself that I become fatter. I become avoidant of public space.”*

Jess, 26-year-old, guidance counsellor added: *“I was **judged by my parents** that I would not be able to have boyfriend. They resort to teasing me especially I am wearing fitted shirts and would often venture to **‘hostile’ and ‘humiliating’** situation because my parents would comment about my size when there are guests are in the house. I become uncomfortable when there are guests inside the house. I would avoid getting out of my room. My family has pressured me too much.”*

Invisibility

*“It’s also very clear you are fat if you don’t fit into ‘normal’ things that ‘normal-sized’ people do. If desks are uncomfortable because you’re too big. If you **must buy bigger clothes** than most people, your age. If you can’t find clothes. Non-fat people are people who society was built for. I am obviously not speaking here of physical invisibility, since the topic above, in which fat people are absent from the public sphere, more aptly covers that base. (Peachy, 42-year old university professor).*

Kim, 24, bank teller revealed her experience on being non-existent when she goes shopping for clothes- *“I think my body feels floating and invisible because when I ask for my clothes. I am not me because sales clerks would back off if I ask for bigger sizes, because they feel I take up more space, more time to fit, have more mass and more gravity, **(sa tingin ko parang inapply nila ang Physics ang tingin nila sa akin)** and they apply double the size for me.”*

Mars, 33, food taster and blogger mentioned and summed up during his video chat said, *“I think I’m hyper-aware of how I fit into the world and how I don’t fit into the world because it is the already in the mind of other people the tendency to blame fat people and **‘ako mataba subsequently blaming it on them, so ang nangyayari manhid sila sa mga matataba’**, and tendency to ignore and dismiss our needs as fat individuals are being demanded by being in this situation. **‘So, hindi na ako nag rereklamo.’**”*

Julie, 28, graduate school student noted in her journal: *“I am not entertained as a person but my being overweight. For me to sit down in LRT, I must summon a network of thoughts that goes as follows: how much room is there on the seat? Who is sitting in the two seats surrounding it? Are they already making faces as I am considering sitting next to them? Are they sort of hunching themselves in annoyance? Will my hips squeeze their hips?”*



What will they think if my legs are touching theirs when I sit down?

Drew, 38, blogger argues that: *“As part of my daily activity, I go to the Sports Complex to do my exercises because I want to lose weight because I think of myself as **not seen and not heard by my friends and co-workers**. They always shut me out and left me there as if I am stuff toy. They only remember me if they have no one to talk to. I scared of being alone and have trauma about being overweight. I have to lose weight to get my identity back into visual field of my friends and acquaintances.”*

Disembodiment

Mars, 33, explains: *“given my weight and defective veins on my legs, it becomes extra difficult for me to go wherever I want to go. I must ride an electric generated scooter to bring me to my destination. I get of my comfort zone (my home) because my nature of work I get invited to graced various food tasting. My obese body is being materialized here because **Magana kumain daw ang mga matataba**’ most people would always comment, and I have a penchant for good food. At this point my body becomes a pass and key to making their food business rate.”*

Belle, 32, researcher and short story writer revealed: *“there’s a colleague who told me that **basura daw ang nasa loob ng tiyan ko** because she feels my stomach is big. I was really hurt because she’s a trash talker and her brains too. I eventually ignored it **kasi parinig**’, if I confront her, she would always deny, and I refuse to dignify the comment. Rude words that are indirectly referred to me is emotional and psychological abuse. It is bullying directed to my body because as *If I have a new body that she is loathing at.*”*

Rommel, 55, community engagement officer, recounted: ***I hate to see people pinpointing***

to my stomach that’s bloated? I feel so insulted that I am being looked down as a piece of stomach rather than as a person. I would usually tell these people that I own my body, and nobody has the right to shame my body because it belongs to me. They should always look at their flaws before shaming other people. I will wear whatever I like because I accept my body.”

Drew, 38, event blogger said, *“At some point when a friend, family member or someone teases you that I looked like a **salbabida**’ directly pointing to my belly. That moment I became powerless to their insults. The fact that I am trying to lose weight and the process of losing weight is a **painful process**, and fat shaming is much, much painful. The fat shaming experience has become negative that I refuse to respect people. The obese body I have is associated with painful experience wherein I have lost my sense of belongingness because I clearly see their humorous actions and they resort to ridicule. Nobody respects my views and opinion.”*

Peachy, 42 stressed, *“I only now realized when my friends and colleagues call me ‘Madame’ that it was meant as **madambuhala**’ because all those years I am fond to wear lose shirts to hide my unwanted bulges. Their fat shaming made me more miserable because I eat more and treat myself more. I became deaf of the criticisms and comments- **I paid no attention to my looks and less critical of myself.**”*

Internalization

Ferdie, 45, DJ and station manager relates his experience: *“From childhood to high school, I was blessed with a leaner physique. I gained weight in college, when I learned how to drink, bolster my penchant for cheese, ice cream, and junk foods. This continued until I got employed, but due my job is in media, **I became self-conscious**. I started to exercise and going to gym is my resort. I was not consistent though. The longest I would try*

Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019



*to exercise and hang out in the gym is one month, so my weight was a yoyo- I would lose, gain, lose again- until I got tired of the cycle and I just didn't care. Then came the **health scare- laboratory stats went haywire**. I panicked, and I went back to the gym and became consistent since then. I technically feel not being fat shamed by other people (although the closest friends would comment about my beer belly), but the truth be told, **I had a poor self-image when I was overweight. I would say that I was fat-shaming myself.**"*

Divina aged 52 disclosed: *"at my age now, I feel guilty because I have to blame myself of getting large. I don't feel good in myself... **nakaka-guilty** when buying clothes because I tried hard to buy darker colors to hide my 'bulges'. I don't like mirrors in public except my private room. I realized that I am avoiding my large body. But my self-confidence was not affected at all. I hate to tell you these, **I hated my body and I hated myself more** because fat shaming has not affected me at all because I look right looking at myself."*

Rejection

Peaches Ani, 18, expresses her sentiments about fat shaming: *"I was so aggressive that I told this nice looking classmate that I like him, he only smiled at me but I got what he meant, **I felt so rejected when my crush told me that we should be friends only**, because we are too young. I imagined how he grinned behind my back. Still, we remained friends. From that time on, since I have plus sized body I became like the boys in schools, I joined their group and acted as if I felt nothing. I was numbed of what other people would say about my size. I fit myself in all occasions and **I committed to myself that I must excel** to be noticed, first by my crush but to no avail."*

Jess, 26, remembers how she felt rejected during family gathering: *"my family members and relatives would tease me and say I'd diet, eat less.*

*They would give me funny looks when I had been wearing something fitted and exposing my belly. I got sick of hearing it, and fed up, that I'd eat more just to spite everyone. **Kind of like a middle finger to the world** that I didn't care, but deep down I really did. I felt as if being my size at that time was something to be ashamed of, something I was doing wrong."*

Drew, 38, he recalls the reaction of being rejected: *"they are saying right to your face about obesity issue. Their **body language manifests you're already unwelcome**. Belongingness like striking conversation after answering turn their backs on you and converse with the other. I felt, disgusted because seem they do not respect me. It's a mind battle between healthy and unhealthy because if I would react, they will ridicule me."*

Changing body image

Kate, aged 27, promised herself: *"I am very active now...I manage my cleaning business and have great clients. I enjoy outings with my family and take the children to theme parks & holidays in the because I gained my confidence in stopping myself from denial. Yes, I am fat, so what... I could not fit in the theme park rides but for the sake of my children I joined them. I am **trying to put back life into my body which was previously taken away** from me by fat shaming I don't mind those 'excess', loose hanging skin. One thing important is I have a life to live with my family."*

Kim, 25, voiced: *"I suffered severe fat shaming when I was in high school and my father would persistently tell me to get up early and stop eating. I am also fat shamed by my elder brother, he would pinch me all over because he likes to bite me as if looked like a **'suckling piglet'**. I was emotionally tired that I resorted to more eating to escape. I sustained black/bluish bruising all over my body. I never felt loved by my family. I had huge problems in overcoming my eating. My*



Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

*mother would often go into my room and secretly took away my provisions. She's worried that she brought me to child psychiatrist and I was diagnosed with emotional eating as a teenager. I undergo therapy and for some time, I was on antidepressants. My mom enrolled me to a personality class and there I saw myself because I was able to relate same situation with girls my age. **I discovered myself through painting, sketching and Hawaiian dancing.** I was grateful for the patience of my mother and my aunt as my support group."*

ANALYSIS

The data gathered, specifically the discourse thread of the participants in the social media revealed that overweight and obese persons 'internalize' the idea that their bodies and needs are invisible, or at least not as important. When reading literature on fat shaming, most authors mentioned the feeling of invisibility. In fact, Goodman (1995) argues that "fat people virtually feel invisible" and these cannot be denied because of the participants particularly women always experience that they are hyper-visible, yet they are invisible when their needs are to be address (e.g. clothes fitting). Fat shaming becomes relevant experience because they become a public spectacle (Kusz, 2005; Owen, 2009, Pyle and Loewy, 2006).

As overweight and obese participants navigate their "selves" into society, the sense of invisibility becomes symbolic, feeling unseen rather than highly obvious. The interaction between the one being fat shame is detached as the participants' experiences and stories show they are ridiculed, derided and ignored. Specifically, when addressing for their needs, they must struggle to get their attention and yet they get offended. Invisibility becomes a censorship of a fat person thus he or she becomes invisible (Butler, 1990).

According to Coleman (2010), invisibility imposes social rejection, isolation and lowered expectation, which is related to the word 'invisible' as uttered by several participants in their interviews. As a result of this invisibility continuing fat shaming becomes a symbolic spectacle, i.e., blaming of it on themselves because they are fat and other people who tend to ignore or dismiss their needs or comfort in social situations. If they feel uncomfortable and if the fault is supposedly their own, then they do not complain, and they find means to minimize any discomfort of being an overweight or obese person.

Internalization of the idea that our bodies and needs are invisible or at least not important are 'normal' reactions to fat shaming (Pyle and Loewy, 2006). It virtually a cliché that fat persons feel invisible (Gilmartin, Long & Soldin, 2013; Puhl, Andreyeva & Brownell, 2008) but fat shaming experiences are rather navigated by the body through a small world, feel unseen rather than highly observable in many social situations (Butler, 2005). As a result of this invisibility and the subsequent blaming of it on fat folks ourselves, many fat persons tend to ignore or dismiss our own needs or comfort in social situations (Brewis & Wutich, 2014; Saguy, 2013; Saguy & Riley, 2005). If we feel uncomfortable and if the fault is supposedly our own, then not only should we not complain but we should minimize any discomfort being an overlarge, plus size bodies because we might possibly inflict to victimize ourselves. After hearing my respondents' stories, it finally occurred to me that this sense of invisibility is more symbolic.

Almost all participants they did feel conspicuous and self-conscious in many social situations. In Stigma, sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) labels this episode as 'covering' and states:

"Despite quite literally taking up more physical space, many fat persons reduce or ignore our expectations of comfort and inclusion, minimize themselves, tuck



Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

themselves into tiny nooks, fold themselves inward in order to limit the insult of in their bulks. The stigmatized persons attempt to minimize their stigmatized attribute in order to make those 'normals' feel more socially comfortable. "

When the environment hurts plus size people, they usually blame themselves and wonder how to change their body and protect their image. change ourselves and protect others from us. Thus, when bloggers or newspaper journalists condemn fat persons for taking up too much space on airplanes, buses, at tables, in theatres, in restaurants, or while simply standing in line (Grosz, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Stebbins, 2006; Szwarc, 2008), they are not taking into account the agilities that some of fat people perform to avoid to be noticed in public places for them to minimize the space they occupy. This is the process of invisibility to show those who are fat shaming fat people they are unchallenged, and everybody needs space and freedom (Schilling, 2003).

Perhaps this maybe an overstatement, that all participants obviously manifest the mentality that fat shaming is concretized into a preconceived notion that is a deviation from the perceived ideal body form. Most of the participants' lived experiences showed how they struggle to get the approval of the social environment. The fear of being disconnected to their actual body becomes a phenomenon itself. These were revealed in their experiences, i.e., journals and blogsites and women specifically mentioned the experience of being universally shocked at how large they seem when compared to their mental image of their bodies.

Several participants indicated their fat shaming experiences as recognizing themselves as fat often occurred when catching the site of their reflection or seeing photos of themselves within the group. Most women narrate their experiences happen in buying or shopping for clothes. These are dramatic moments that would always sneer their fat shaming experience within themselves and becomes a cruel and apathetic experience.

Most female participants and a few male participants interviewed, fearing such revelations, indicated they would concoct whatever scheme necessary to avoid appearing in photographs or glancing into mirrors. This self-imposed lack of awareness serves as a shield that allows some (not all, of course) of us to maintain a mental image of ourselves (Cooley, 1902; Goffman, 1963; Coleman, 2010). Contrary to literatures and popular conceptions of most women's notions of their bodies as larger than the reality and as smaller than their desired body form.

This perception is surprisingly easy to maintain, since it is physically impossible to see ourselves all at once without the aid of technology. Interviewees Jess, Drew, Ferdie, Divina, Peachy, and Kim revealed that they either imagine themselves as thinner than they are or else deign to forget or ignore their own body size when interacting with others. Meanwhile, Rommel, 55-year-old, research facilitator reveals that he fully aware that he is overweight, he insists to proud of his fat body. He even walked differently than he does now in attempt to be accepted that he is different that he existed only 'up above' and 'ignored below.' Rommel stresses that acting as though he has not 'anybody' in public and letting his personality speak of his fat body. He does not let his body himself, neither he's allowing his body defines him, so he controls his fat body.

Lastly, three participants subjected their experiences to visual or drawing sessions to express their experiences and encounters of fat shaming which they feel adequate describe them. The conception of relationship between acts of consciousness of being overweight or obese individual and the phenomenon of fat shaming will clarify the visual representation of the fat shaming experience within their artwork, as can be seen in the reflective analysis of their discourse. The epistemological experience of drawing concretely theorizes the phenomena within the consciousness which, in turn becomes the "object for systematic analysis and reflection" (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). It



Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

is their way of releasing the stigma and giving them a chance to accept their body form, as their actions speak louder than words (Wann, 1998).

CONCLUSION

The culture of fat shaming is prevalent in the Filipino family and perpetuated in the society. This being formed within the family and inculcated into the mind of the large individuals. It clearly shows that the human mind is conditioned to look at the “ideal body form” as the basis of comparison. The fat shaming experiences of the participants are but the product of the symbolic interaction of the overweight and obese persons with society. They become merely the symbolic representation of deviance from what is normative.

Technically, this paper has allowed the researcher to deal with the participants’ conception of how they would embody their personal experience in relation to fat shaming. Though, a handful committed participants shared their fat shaming encounters yet, their experiences have brought about to the surface how the process of fat shaming occurs in the Filipino context. It also brought to the researcher’s attention that these fat shaming experiences could be a drawing experience such that artwork can mediate the personal experiences on fat shaming.

The exposition of the creative self of an overweight or obese individual gives a physical symbolism of fat shaming. Moreover, these drawings or visual representations provide a horizon in which it’s possible to begin to examine embodied expression or internalized expression of fat shaming within the interpretation of “being-in-the-world,” or the “the world -is-emphasizing-with me” feeling (Dilthey, 2010). Thus, grasping the society’s understanding through revealed meaning of their drawings and find structure of being after being ‘fat shamed.’ The encounter and the release from fat shaming phenomenon gathers the broken

pieces of himself or herself and “opens up” to the social world that “I am too wide for your narrow mind.” Consequently, you must ‘take me as I am,’ because I must exist.

REFERENCES

- Agoncillo, T. (1990). *History of the Filipino People*. Quezon City: Garotech Publishing.
- Anderson-Faye, E.P. & Brewis, A. (2016). *Fat Planet: Obesity, Culture and Symbolic Capital*. New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press (electronic book copy).
- Brewis, A.A. & Wutich, A. (2015). A world of suffering? Biocultural approaches to fat stigma in the global context of the obesity epidemic. *Annals of Anthropological Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/napa.12056>.
- Brewis, A. A.& Wutic, A. (2018). Stigma, The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology. (1-7), (2018). Wiley Online Library.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Caroll, N. (1999). *Philosophy of Art*. London: Routledge.<http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/97802031972233>.
- Coleman, L.M. (2010). Stigma: An enigma demystified. In: Davis LJ (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp.216–231.
- Cooley, C.H. (1902). *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Scribner’s.
- Dilthey, W. (2010). *Understanding the Human World- Selected Works*. In Makkreel, R. A. & Rodi, F.(eds), vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press.



Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019

- Farrell, A.E. (2011). *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press. pp. 25-56; 116-119. ISBN 978-0-8147-2769-0.
- Gilmartin, J.; Long, A.F.; Soldin, M. (2013). Identity transformation and a changed lifestyle following dramatic weight loss and body contouring surgery. *Journal of Health Psychology*. doi:10.1177/1359105313512838.
- Goodman, W.C. (1995). *The Invisible Woman: Confronting Weight Prejudice in America*. Carlsbad, CA: Gurez Books.
- Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma (Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc. pp. 1-15; 126-130.
- Grosz, E. (2005). Refiguring bodies. In: Fraser, M. and Greco, M. (eds) *The Body: A Reader*. London: Routledge, pp.47-51.
- Guthman, J. (2009). Teaching the politics of obesity: Insights into neoliberal embodiment and contemporary biopolitics. *Antipode*. 41 (5). pp. 1110-1113.
- Hancock, T. (2015). *Life in the Fat Body (Exploring the Multiple Realities of Fat Embodiment)*. Unpublished Master of Arts in Cultural Anthropology thesis. University of Wellington.
- Hackman, J., Maupin, J. & Brewis, A.A. (2016). Weight-related stigma is a significant psychosocial stressor in developing countries: Evidence from Guatemala. *Social Science & Medicine*, 161, p. 15.
- Lawrence, R.G. (2004). Framing Obesity: The Evolution of News discourse on a Public Health Issue 9(3): 56-75.
- Lewis, A. (2006). On a plane, niceness is outweighed. *Denver Post*, September 4. Available at: http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci_4286897.
- Lupton, D. (2012). "The Body in Medicine" in *Medicine as Culture (Illness, Disease and the Body)*. London: Sage Publication, pp. 35-45.
- Kovats, T. (2007). *The Drawing Book: A survey of Drawing: The Primary Means of Expression*. London: The Black Dog Publishing.
- Kusz, N. (2005). On being invisible. In: Jarrell D and Sukrungruang I (eds) *Scout Over, Skinny: The Fat Nonfiction Anthology*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, pp.20-29.
- McClure, K., Puhl, R.M. & Heuer, C.A. (2011). Obesity in the news: Do photographic images of obese persons influence anti-fat attitudes? *Journal of Health Communication* 16, p. 359-371.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). *Eye and Mind*. In J. E. Edie (ed), *The Primacy of Perception*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1963). *The Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Ogden, J. (2013). The possible positive consequences of obesity stigma. Paper presented at the Weight Stigma Conference: Weight Stigma and Health, Birmingham, UK.
- Owen, L. (2012). Living fat in a thin-centric world: effects of spatial discrimination on fat bodies and shame. *Feminism and Psychology*. p. 1-17. doi:10.1177/095735312445360.
- Owen, L. (2008). *Living Large in a Size Medium World: Performing Fat, Stigmatized Bodies and Discourses*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz.
- Owen, L. (2009). Tightening up loose bodies and morals: Dieting away the sin. *The Body as a Site of Discrimination*. Available at: <http://www.bodydiscrimination.com/>.
- Plummer, K. (1979). Misunderstanding Labeling Perspective. In Downe, D. and Rock, P. (eds) *Deviant Interpretations*. Oxford University Press. pp. 85-110.

Presented at the 12th DLSU Arts Congress
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
February 20, 21 and 22, 2019



- Puhl, R.M. & Heuer, C. (2009). The stigma of obesity; a review and update. *Obesity* (17 (5)), pp.941-964.
- Puhl, R.M., Andreyeva, T., & Brownell, K. D. (2008). Perceptions of weight discrimination: Prevalence and comparison to race and gender discrimination in America. *International Journal on Obesity*. 32(6), pp. 992-1000. doi: 10.1038/ijo.2008.22
- Pyle, N.C. & Loewy, M.I. (2006). An invisible community: Fat men and the men who love them. In: Carrigan JA (organizer) *Sociology of Sexuality II Session, Pacific Sociological Association Conference*, April 22.
- Rich, E. & Evans, J. (2005). Fat ethics- the obesity discourse and body politics. *Social Theory and Health*. 3 (4) pp. 341-358.
- Saguy, A.C. (2013). *What's Wrong with Fat?* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Saguy, A.C. & Riley, K.W. (2005). Weighing both sides: morality, mortality, and framing contexts over obesity. *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*. 30 (5) pp. 869-921.
- Schuster, R.C., Seung, Y.H., Brewis, A.A., & Wutich, A. (2018). Increasing overweight and obesity erodes engagement in one's neighborhood by women, but not men, *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 10.1016/j.pmedr.2018.02.013, 10, pp. 144-149.
- Shilling, C. (2003). *The Body and Social Theory*, 2nd ed. London: Sage Publication.
- Smith, D. (1999). Knowing a society from within: A woman's standpoint. In: Lemert, C. (ed.) *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp.388-390.
- Stearns, P.M. (1997). *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West*. New York & London: New York University Press.
- Stebbins, J. (2006). Chicago, home of the deep-dish pizza, widens bus seats – Again. American Seating Web Site. Available at: <http://www.americanseating.com/uploadedFiles/News/2004/Insight%20in%20Bloomberg%20News.pdf>.
- Szwarc, S. (2008). No fat people allowed: Only the slim will be allowed to dine in public! Junkfood Science Blog, 31 January. Available at: <http://junkfoodscience.blogspot.com/2008/01/no-fat-people-allowed-only-slim-will-be.html>.
- Veale, D. (2002). Shame in body dysmorphic disorder. In *Body Shame*; Gilbert, P., Miles, J., eds.; Hove, UK, New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge: pp. 267-282.
- Wann, M. (1998). *Fat!So? Because You Don't Have to Apologize for Your Size!* Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Wood-Barcalow, N.L., Tylka, T.L., Augustus-Horvath, C.L. (2010). "But I like my body": Positive body image characteristics and a holistic model for young-adult women. *Body Image*. 7, p. 106-116.