

A Study of Female Body Shaming in the Fashion and Clothing Industry

-Take Brandy Melville as an Example

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Abstract: Since ancient times, each era has had its own unique standard of beauty. The standards of beauty in modern society are very different from those in ancient times. In modern society, thin is beautiful, and women wear clothes to highlight their figures. This may not be a personal standard of beauty, but it has spread throughout society and is respected by many people. BM is an Italian clothing brand that goes by the full name Brandy Melville and is known for having only one size. BM style is a clothing style based on the clothes produced by this brand, which rose in the 1980s. Taking the BM style as an example, this paper will explore the origin, characteristics, popular reasons, and existing disputes of the BM style to demonstrate the aesthetic standards of today's society. This kind of aesthetic standard first produces certain negative effects on the body. Women who don't fit this criterion will get there in unhealthy ways. Secondly, it also has an impact on women's psychology. If woman does not meet this standard, they will be discriminated against by the society, by man, even by other woman who fits that standard. These negative effects show how ridiculous this aesthetic is.

Keywords: fashion, BM style, body shame

1. Introduction

Beauty is an indispensable topic for every generation. Each generation's aesthetic is different. During the Tang Dynasty, plumpness was considered beautiful, but extreme thinness is not beauty. For example, Yang Yuhuan of the Tang Dynasty has many portraits, most of which are plump. And she was favoured by the emperor for decades. Therefore, the Tang Dynasty is considered to be beautiful for its plump body rather than its thin body. In recent decades, beauty has been all about fair skin and slim body, almost all models and actors strive to be thin and fair skin. With the development of the Internet, various new media platforms have emerged. Resulting in Internet users, as independent individuals, getting many platforms where they can fully display themselves. Under this premise, women as an important part of the social group also received great attention. On the other hand, as the spotlight on women increases, the behaviours of women will be focused more, including figure and dress. On social media, there is a lot of discussion and different opinions about women's bodies and dressing styles. The idea that thin is beautiful is spread on social media and

society. This aesthetic spread widely and rapidly throughout society and had many admirers or followers. Most of the photos on social media are of people who are thin and with fair skin, both male and female. Women's clothing styles try to accentuate their body proportions, which show their length of legs. The spread of such images has negative effects. Many people will be desperate to conform to this aesthetic and try to lose weight in order to achieve a body that fits society rather than the healthy body that they prefer. Once their body shape is not what society wants it to be, or what most people it is, it can lead to low self-esteem and body shame. It is a herd mentality where people feel like they cannot be different from the majority. Studies have shown that many adolescents have the mindset of losing weight, accompanied by severe body anxiety [1]. The reason for this phenomenon is that people have developed this kind of body anxiety and aesthetic issues, especially women's clothes and figures are particularly concerned. Another research has shown that many young people think about losing weight all day in order to conform to the social aesthetic standard [2]. This research will take Brandy Melville as an example to study body shame. Brandy Melville is an Italian clothing brand that has risen in recent years and is popular for its concept of "one size fits all," which only comes in small sizes. The brand implies that only the body size worn small size is a good body size [3]. Many celebrities and bloggers are following and spreading this trend that has led to the current beauty of being fair skin and thin. The brand produces only small size of women's clothes, resulting in only women's bodies being emphasized and stared at. This may be a reason cause female's body shame and strict body aesthetics. The advantages or disadvantages of this kind of aesthetics by browsing various literature and materials will be studied in this research so that more consumers can have their own understanding and views on aesthetics.

2. The Rise of Brandy Melville and Its Controversial Marketing Concept

Beauty has been a constant theme from ancient times to the present. Although body image gives an initial impression of beauty and ugliness, aesthetics that decide what can be called beauty or ugliness is always changing. This means that the body that people find beautiful now was not necessarily also beautiful in ancient times. For example, the ancient Chinese considered women with foot binding to be beautiful, whereas today's society considers women wearing high heels to be charming [4]. This is an aesthetic difference resulting from the changing times. Due to the change in social form and the liberation of free thoughts, the aesthetic nowadays tends to be diversified gradually. However, the trend towards thinness as beauty is here to stay and continue growing. For example, one of the most famous shows in the modeling world is called Victoria's Secret. Based on some researches, all of the models who can stand on this show are thin. Their thinness can even easily see the bones on the face and body are prominent. Even their clothes became smaller and smaller, with strict requirements for the circumference of all body parts [5]. These models will even go on a liquid diet up to six weeks before the show in order to look slim on stage. There are also actors and singers who will try their best to lose weight in order to wear the dress. Sometimes once they put on a little bit more weight than before, they are mocked by the Internet users for getting fat and not paying attention to body management. The camera and screens will make people appear more overweight, so stars and actors are more critical of their bodies. In the process, they also spread the idea of extreme thinness through their influence. This leads that people nowadays being bent on being extremely thin, thus intensifying the speed and scale of the popularity of this type of BM brand.

BM is an abbreviation for Brandy Melville, an Italian womenswear brand, and BM style refers to a style of dressing that originated from Brandy Melville [6], a brand that originated in the 1980s. The brand's first store was opened in Los Angeles in 2009. As BM rose to popularity as a brand, the BM style gradually took shape. The BM style is characterized by fashionable, simple designs and sweet and hot styles that highlight the girlish body shape. Due to the first store being located in the

United States, some adjustments were made to the brand style at the beginning of the brand, which created the brand to incorporate some American style. BM style is somewhat similar to the American style. Compared to the BM style, the most remarkable feature of this brand, of course, is the concept of “one size fits all”. This is one of the most controversial aspects of the brand and the style. In the free and confident society, this “one size fits all” is not consistent with the life people aspire to. There are also some people who think that the clothes that show their body shape is what they aspire to. In BM stores, most of the products on sale only have one size, and this size is very small. Usually, only thin consumers can enjoy them. Moreover, it has its own independent set of height and weight standards to correspond to which size girls can wear the brand’s clothes. For example, a girl of 150cm in height weighs 33kg, while a girl of 170cm weighs 51kg. However, this standard is sought after by many, or abused by many, creating the brand’s controversy [7].

3. Reasons for BM Style’s Popularity

3.1. Social Media and Influencers for Brand Promotion

BM brings controversy as well as a lot of traffic and heat to itself. The BM style may not be well known by the public at the early stage of its formation, but due to the fate of various opinions leaders and the promotion and dissemination of new media platforms, the BM style will spread at breakneck speed and eventually popular in the fashion industry and daily life. Media has now penetrated every aspect of life, and people spend time on social media. In the past 20 years, social media news has globalized and broken through geographical limitations [8]. Becoming consequently media has played a crucial role in the development of BM [9]. The present celebrities are bent on being white and young and thin, while their aesthetics and every move are amplified by the Internet, thus influencing many people. After opening the social media accounts of these stars found that nine out of 10 are white and thin. Some celebrities are already thin to the point of sickness, yet they continue to lose weight. And this situation will be strongly followed by fans who will continue losing weight. One of the reasons for the popularity of BM is the psychological herd mentality of following fashion trends. Many bloggers and celebrities are often exposed to fashion-related content. And they pay more attention to dressing because of their profession; thus, they will look for many different styles. Especially, BM style as one of the styles that include the American style is quickly noticed by bloggers and celebrities. With the celebrity effect and social media spreading, this style soon be followed by the celebrity’s followers. For example, some Chinese celebrities have tens of millions of followers on social media, which represents a solid fan base. Fans will follow what celebrities wear in airports and in public [10]. Then the fans will imitate what the stars wear. Many celebrities highlight their weight loss by choosing clothes that show off their body shapes. BM style is thus widely noticed by stars due to its slimmer version. This has led to the BM style dressing; although there are many controversies, still prevalent in the world.

3.2. Homogenized Aesthetics of Brands and Consumers

Another reason for the popularity of the most straightforward BM style is that its design is in line with the aesthetics of young girls. Young people are the main force in the market, and young girls seek comfort, beauty and fashion in their clothes. BM has a considerable need since it fits young women’s aesthetics. The BM brand clothes give people a feeling of youthful and beautiful, sexy and lively. Most of them are paired with plunging necklines and tiny skirts or pants. The length of the top clothes should show the navel and the collar should show the collarbone. The upper section will be longer in the upper body and longer in the lower body, showing better proportions. Showing the collarbone can show the thinness. Such a combination is comfortable and can reflect the long legs of the body. Besides, a sufficient product line can ensure the diversity of BM clothing styles, and

consumers can complete the diversified choice of personal dressing styles in one store. Consumers can choose to wear skirts or pants. They can also choose many different patterns to show different styles. For example, Lisa from the Korean girl group Blackpink can give people a cool feeling through BM style at times and make them feel sweet at other times. Different people also wear different styles of BM, which shows that one of the brands BM brings a wide range and a high degree of adaptability to different styles of people. This is also the reason why it has a very wide audience and very high sales.

4. Discussion on Potential Problems and Impacts of “One Size Fits All”

On the street, it is relatively not challenging to see that many white and thin girls wear BM style clothes. On the network can only see skinny girls wearing BM style clothes. It is rare for a fat girl to wear BM style clothes. What accounts for this kind of dress differentiation? One of them is that today's society is pointing the finger at women's dress. Not even just fat girls will be excluded from BM; many ordinary girls, girls who do not look fat will also be pointed out. Even if these girls can barely fit into BM brand clothes, they will be told “do not wear it if you are so fat” or “you look so fat and ugly to wear it”. Society's visual aesthetic demands are very high for women. These voices and opinions lead to body shame as women with average bodies are less confident to try BM, or those who don't want to be discarded by the so-called fashion trends will try various ways to control their body shapes. Body shame can cause specific negative effects on both the body and the mind [11]. For the psychological aspect, as mentioned before, women can develop a personality that is not confident. They will have doubts about their body shape, all aspects of themselves, and that they are not good enough due to some outside voices. They will develop a sense of disgust and shame about their body image. Those women who can wear BM style clothes and are in great shape also develop a distorted mentality of deformed aesthetics and want to lose weight all the time to fit this monstrous mass aesthetic. The spread of the Internet to BM may have influenced, even controlled, the public's judgment of beauty. The BM brand's “one size fits all” makes body of young girls' standards so strict that a healthy 170cm woman's weight range is 60kg, while BM promotes a 170cm woman's weight of 51kg or less for wearing their brand's clothes. This leads to women going on a diet to wear BM clothes and show off their figures. In the process of weight loss, they try various ways such as intense exercise, diet pills, skipping meals, and medical aesthetics [12]. Therefore, the BM style concept of “one size fits all” has an indelible negative impact on women's health and psychology.

Based on this, this research is a call for women to give up body anxiety and body shame. No one should give up their health, both mental and physical, by adapting to any brand. The world is not just like BM, there are many regular-sized clothes and brands. Weight is only a measure of health and should not be a criterion for choosing what to wear. Weight should be kept in a healthy range, not an otherwise healthy weight that is given up to fit into a certain dress. An aesthetic at the cost of health must not be the right aesthetic [13]. From the perspective of society, there should be more tolerance for women's bodies so that women can eliminate body anxiety and body shame. Mainstream media should reduce the positive marketing of body size and small clothes and thinness. Let nature take its course and let each person decide for themselves what beauty is. Instead of promoting the idea of thinness through celebrities and the media. Celebrities may be thin for work needs, but the ordinary people as long as healthy. As for individuals, they should give up their body anxiety and body shame, focus on themselves, and ignore as many abnormal voices as possible. Weight is not a measure of a person's size. A healthy weight is different for people of different heights. Everyone should discard the dross and gain the essence from outside environment. The right voices from outside can be accepted, but each person should have their own judgment. Maybe if everyone is more confident, they will be able to judge the different voices of the outside world

rather than looking for reasons from their own body when the outside world is judging them. For the brand, they should not focus on only one size. While having only one size may bring heat to the brand, comfort is what matters most to the masses and is the most important. Making some different sizes may make the brand no different from other brands on the sizes, but it will make more people wear it, so the market might be more comprehensive which is not a bad thing.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, this study tells the rise of the BM brand and the existing disputes, as well as the drawbacks of disputes. The brand's concept of "one size fits all" attracted a large number of girls and spread quickly. The reason for the spread is because of the influence of celebrities and media, as well as the different feel of the brand's design style. The results of this study show that the BM brand concept can have a negative impact on individuals' physical and psychological health. The analysis showed that people, especially females, have come to regard thinness as the sole criterion for their body shape. The existence of the BM brand excites this idea, making people produce the social aesthetic that slim is beautiful. That belief, which spreads fast through the Internet and celebrities, may be hard to change in the short term. In such a social aesthetic, people are more likely to have body shame. Not only fat people but also thin people may feel inferior. Therefore, in order to change this aesthetic deformity as much as possible, this paper discusses three levels. Society, brands and individuals should all work together to reduce body shaming when it comes to dressing. One limitation of this paper is the lack of actual research. This paper is based on the analysis of some past literature rather than an independent survey. In the future development, the research can carry out some systematic investigation or experiment to get some data so as to make the content more credible. The future development direction of BM brand can be used as a research direction to observe whether the phenomenon of body shame in society has been improved.

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