What the hell are you doing? A systematic review of psychosocial precursors of slut-shaming.

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Abstract

Slut-shaming is a form of discrimination against those who violate gender stereotypes, independent of that person's gender identity or sexual orientation or sexual behaviour and appearance. Slut-shaming is a sexual stigmatization perpetrated both by women and men through rumours, criticism and ostracism and it has severe negative effects both on self-identity and interpersonal relations; these effects include avoidance, depression and self-blame. This review focuses on psychosocial factors associated with vulnerability to slut-shaming exposure and was carried out using the new PRISMA protocol. Articles were retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science electronic databases. After having initially considered 585 articles, 19 studies were selected for this research. Gender norms and sexual double standards were identified as meaningful precursor variables of slut-shaming exposure. Moreover, gender differences were highlighted: female adolescents, young women and LGBTQI+ individuals seem more likely to be at risk of slut-shaming exposure and seem to suffer more severe negative consequences. Certain pivotal recommendations have been made in order to prevent and avoid slut-shaming, and these include developing social interventions targeting gender and sexual discrimination, fostering gender awareness as a protective factor and making informed decisions within a clinical context.

1. Introduction

Almost all aspects of life are ruled by cultural norms; community expectations may vary according to chronological periods and may be sensitive in varying degrees to social changes. Gender roles and sexual behaviours are determined by cultural norms and show clearly the magnitude of social stereotypes (Butler, 2004; Braidotti, 1991; Gilligan, 1982). In every culture, stereotypes define the timings and ways in which men and women experience their sexuality by adapting to precise norms of behaviour; in almost every case, these criteria seem to be more restrictive for women than for men. When stereotypical roles are violated, alarm bells ring and communities react with a set of practices that label non-compliant behaviours as harmful and inadmissible, thus ensuring that individuals who do not fit the stereotype will be rejected and penalized (Hooks, 1984, 2000; 2005; Burns & Granz, 2021).

Slut-shaming can be seen as a form of discrimination towards those who violate, question and do not conform to gender stereotypes. Slut-shaming is defined as the act of subjecting someone to shame for his/her actual or perceived sexual availability and sexual behaviour; it is perpetrated through rumours, rejection, and insults (Goblet & Glowacz, 2021). Slut-shaming may be defined as

a form of bullying (Miller, 2016; Pickel & Gentry, 2016) and when it occurs through social media it can be defined as a form of cyberbullying (Goblet & Glowacz, 2021). Criticism and ostracism have the purpose of punishing and condemning those who do not comply with the standards established by gender stereotypes. Individuals exposed to gender discrimination may present forms of internalized sexual oppression (Ringrose & Renold 2012; Armstrong et al., 2014) and may unconsciously reinforce sexism (Becker, 2010; Barton & Huebner, 2020).

Gender stereotypes impact both men and women and are detrimental for everyone, regardless of their assigned sex; however the content of gender stereotypes differs widely for males and females (Kling et al., 2017; Muggleton et al., 2019). According to male stereotypes, oversexed men who engage in sex with multiple partners and in casual sex are positively labelled as "studs" or "players" (Fjær, et al., 2015; Farvid, et al., 2016; Way et al., 2014; Endendijk, van Baar, & Deković, 2020); the more boys and men are sexually active the more their reputation is enhanced, so that being called a stud, rather than damaging their reputation, actually enhances it. Consequently, male individuals who are stereotypically judged as the opposite of a stud are usually discriminated against and called "fags", which is to say someone who lacks sexual attractiveness, has few partners and has a general lack of sexual activity (Pascoe, 2005). Female stereotypes, however, cause behaviours associated with being sexually available such as dressing or dancing provocatively, attractive makeup, flirting, posting pictures of themselves in revealing poses, having sex outside of a stable relationship or publicly expressing interest in having sex to be judged negatively with regard to girls and women (Payne, 2010; Bay-Cheng 2015; Miller, 2016; Willem, et al., 2019; Williams, 2021). Female individuals who behave like this are commonly insulted by being called a slut. It should be noted that girls and women are highly vulnerable to this type of discrimination: it is quite easy to be called a slut since criticism and disapproval are not always directly related to one's behaviour but very *often arise only due to other people's judgments*, so that it can be very difficult for women to protect themselves. For example, even though girls and women have not had physical contact with another person, and independently of their real sexual behaviour, they risk being labelled as sluts (Papp et al., 2015; Pickel & Gentry, 2016). Moreover, the criteria on which this type of discrimination is based are neither stable nor clear due to the fact that the precise slut-stigma meanings are constantly and actively reconstructed based on varying interactions among individuals (Armstrong et al., 2014; Hamilton, & Armstrong, 2009; Bamberg, 2004).

Sexual minority status (Meyer, 2003), and thus slut-shaming exposure, may also be seen as a risk factor for stigmatization (Herek, 2006) because individuals who do not conform to gender stereotypes are subject to negative judgments. Even if gender stereotypes affect both male and female individuals, gender discrimination is primarily aimed at women and girls who are still oppressed by old and sexist cultural values (Parent & Moradi, 2010; Zaikman et al., 2016). Women and girls are the main targets of slut-shaming, and exposure to sexual stigmatization leads to various negative outcomes, including derision, ostracism, rumors and insults, through words such as *slut, whore, slag, slapper, tart, trollop, ho, wench, hussy, bitch, easy lay, easy woman, loose woman* and many others (Collins English Dictionary, n.d., Nack, 2002; Armstrong et al., 2014). These insults damage a woman's reputation and evoke the idea of a woman who is devoid of morality and, therefore, dangerously devoid of value (Bamberg, 2004**;** Payne, 2010; Hamilton, & Armstrong, 2009; Hunehäll Berndtsson & Odenbring, 2020). Furthermore, contrary to the extensive terminology used to negatively classify a woman with regard to her sexual behaviours, only a few negative labels are related to male sexual behaviour, and the most commonly used offenses are *fag, gay and dyke, fafnir, fagaceous, fag end, faggi, faggot, faggoting, faggotry, faggot vote, faggy, fag hag*, which have the same regulatory effect as the slut label (Collins English Dictionary, n. d.,

Heasley, 2005; Pascoe, 2007; Payne, 2010). Bearing in mind these considerations, this article will primarily focus on slut-shaming experienced by females, without delving deeply into the male experience.

Both women and men can perform slut-shaming towards women of all ages, but even if both can stigmatize certain types of sexual behaviour or alleged sexual behaviour, it seems that men and women have different motivations when discriminating against someone through slut-shaming. Men often use slut-shaming to control and suppress female sexuality in order to secure a sexually-faithful partner and to increase paternity certainty (Papp et al., 2015; Muggleton, et al., 2019). On the other hand, motivations that lead women to slut-shaming are different and are usually related to sexual competition that takes place on two levels; the first level involves intersexual competition. This often involves a form of stereotypical self-promotion such as wearing makeup and form-fitting clothing, whereby women succeed in attracting a partner and in establishing or maintaining a committed relationship with him. The second level involves intrasexual competition. This entails indirect and therefore more insidious aggression such as criticizing, denigrating or spreading rumours about another woman's sexual promiscuity and fidelity; by doing so, women succeed in excluding potential competitors and in establishing or maintaining a committed relationship with a loyal partner (Vaillancourt & Sharma, 2011; Muggleton, et al., 2019). Intersexual competition is one of the main reason for female slut-shaming since a more sexually available woman is seen as a potentially dangerous competitor (Vaillancourt & Sharma, 2011; Armstrong et al., 2014). Considering a woman as sexually available can cause jealousy in other women, who, in order to initiate or maintain a romantic relationship, can then react by denigrating and blaming a dangerous competitor for her sexual behaviour (Papp et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2019).

Slut-shaming can be particularly severe and potentially more damaging when women show intolerance towards charming and sexy young women; even if the aggression is not explicit, women exposed to slut shaming are very sensitive to indirect criticism and are able to recognize the "subtle nuances" (Vaillancourt, 2005) of annoying rumours. Slut-shaming issues may vary according to the subject's age, and so teenagers may be criticized with regard to loss of virginity, while young adult women may be judged for their promiscuous sexual relationships and older adult women may be blamed for the mere fact that they have a sex life.

During adolescence, slut-shaming can be particularly harmful, even for those who engage in it: girls may try to control and regulate their own sexuality in accordance with their peers' sexual behaviour; previous studies have shown a direct causal association between quality of friendship and sexual activity modelling by friends, on one hand, and adolescent sexual activity, on the other (Vacirca et al., 2012; McDavitt & Mutchler, 2014; Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009). Attitudes and assumptions concerning sexual and gender identity will be defined gradually during adolescence and partially determined by peers, with both positive and negative effects; Chambers and colleagues (2004) have identified verbal sexual bullying as a common practice of adolescents in order to determine their peers' sexual identity, including beliefs and values related to sexual morality (Hamilton, & Armstrong, 2009). Adolescent males seem to be particularly vulnerable to sexual bullying due to the strictness of male gender stereotypes (Heasley, 2005; Pascoe, 2007).

Armstrong et al., (2014) have pointed out that women will engage in slut-shaming not only to control others' sexual activity, but also with the purpose of negotiating class differences and setting class-based moral boundaries. Therefore, slut-shaming has different uses and consequences depending on the social class of those who engage in it or suffer it. Likewise, the definition of slut is also influenced by social class backgrounds: low-status women tend to use the term slut with the

meaning of "rich and bitchy", so slut-related discourse may be seen as an expression of class resentment. On the contrary, high-status women do not use the term slut as an insult, but in a positive way that emphasizes their female gender role and their sexual assertiveness (Armstrong et al., 2014; Hamilton, & Armstrong, 2009). Willem and colleagues (2019), highlighted how clothing plays an important role as class markers in order to address insults to defined targets: such as young women, low social class, and low educational level.

Individuals actively redefine types of slut discourse within their own social class so that various meanings help negotiate and set boundaries between groups based on sexual behaviours: men of any social class and high-status women can behave sexually as freely as they want, they are open to a greater possibility of sexual experimentation with a low risk of being criticized; on the other hand, low-status women who explore various types of sexual conduct are at high risk of discrimination. Therefore, sexual privilege is not only the result of sexual or gender identity, but also the result of belonging to a specific social class (Armstrong et al., 2014).

There is broad agreement that individuals who have been abused are likely to be blamed for having been abused and having brought the abuse upon themselves (McDonald et al., 2010; Bongiorno, 2020; Hequembourg et al., 2019); this phenomenon, known as victim blaming, occurs when someone is blamed in whole or in part for the damage that he/she experienced and for having instigated his/her aggressors. Victims of abuse can thus somehow be considered responsible and guilty for the violent experiences they endured, including extremely negative experiences such as acquaintance rape (Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Grubb & Turner, 2012). Likewise, victim blaming may occur within slut-shaming and is one of its most detrimental aspects; it should be noted that exposure to slut-shaming may also increase the risk of victim blaming due to the fact that those who are exposed to slut-shaming suffer from being rejected and are then more vulnerable to social judgment. In particular, when victims are blamed, they are accused of not doing enough to protect themselves and not taking the proper precautions. Victims are blamed and accused of being provocatively dressed, appearing to be sexually available or of having had too much to drink or not checking their drink in order to be sure that nobody had added secretly something to it; sadly, many other reasons are used to blame the victims (Gravelin et al., 2017; Yamawaki, 2007).

Victim blaming is strongly related to cultural contexts and to shared beliefs in an innate female morality originating from women's bodies, such that every violation of stereotypical expectations is judged as outrageous (Ringrose & Renold 2012; Hamilton, & Armstrong, 2009; Willem, et al., 2019). Cultural biases like these influence, among other things, female clothing since attention to women's apparel is widespread in western societies and already at a very young age female children are strongly encouraged to pay attention to their appearance in various contexts, including school, work and leisure. It is worth mentioning that, despite the fact that it is a consequence of social pressure, emphasis on clothing and appearance is often used as proof of a female victim's guilt after suffering a sexual assault.

In the same perspective, a recent study by Meredith Neville-Shepard (2019) has analysed the rhetoric in favour of dress code policies in American schools and has highlighted the fact that girls' bodies are conceived as sources of distraction for young men. As a consequence, according to this approach, girls are responsible for their own safety and nobody should expose their body in unacceptable clothing; dress code policies not only limit and oppress personal freedom, but also

imply that female students who experience sexual harassment are to blame for having provoked their aggressors and for making themselves an easy target (Hackman et al., 2017).

Moreover, focusing excessively on female bodies and judging them according to rigid gender stereotypes increase the risk of slut-shaming; indeed, blaming and shaming may constitute additional trauma and may discourage individuals who have suffered sexual harassment from speaking out. Examining women's reactions to sexual assault, Hequembourg et al., (2019) highlighted the emotional difficulties that arise, with four dominant emergent themes described in their report: avoidance, self-guilt and decisions about revelation, awakening, and finally, the search for help. Women exposed to sexual aggressions may seek to erase their memories and suppress their pain. Often they feel guilty and ashamed and so they doubt it is worth reporting the aggression, and are even unsure when and to whom these reports should be made. Likewise, exposure to slut-shaming may reinforce negative affects and confusion, so women may further hesitate to report sexual aggressions because they are afraid of being ignored by the authorities, or otherwise they may be worried about public exposure. Moreover, minimizing the aggression and not revealing sexual violence is associated with long-term symptoms of severe psychological distress (Hequembourg et al., 2019; Grubb & Turner, 2012).

As was noted above, exposure to slut-shaming may have detrimental consequences in everyday life experiences, so it is crucial to identify psychosocial factors associated with slut-shaming discourse in adolescents and young adults. The main aim of this systematic review, therefore, has been to determine psychosocial precursors of slut-shaming experience.

2. Method

2.1 Sources and Search Procedure

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA guidelines; Moher et al., 2009) were used for this systematic review.

A search was carried out in two electronic databases (Scopus and Web of Science) for articles to be included in the review.

The search terms were «slut-shaming» in the title, or in the abstract or in the keywords; «victim blaming», «gender role conformity», «sex double standard», «sexist attitudes» in the keywords. Search terms were linked with the Boolean operators "AND, OR" to properly identify articles. The publication dates of the articles ranged from 1973 to 2022.

We did not use publishing date limiters, so the search results ranged from the earliest relevant papers up until the date the searches began, 9 March 2022 (Table 1).

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTION OF THE SEARCH STRATEGY
(9 MARCH 2022)

Delimitation of the search	Results
SCOPUS	**419**
TITLE-ABS-KEY (slut AND shaming) (KEY (victim AND blaming) OR KEY (gender AND role AND conformity) OR KEY (sex AND double AND standard) OR KEY (sexist AND attitudes)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar"))	
WEB OF SCIENCE	**166**
ALL=(slut shaming) OR KP=(gender role conformity)) OR KP=(victim blaming)) OR KP=(sexist attitudes)) OR KP=(sex double standard) and Articles (Document Types) and English (Languages)	

The search produced a total of 585 articles, of which 419 items were returned by Scopus, and 166 by Web of Science.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria and Selection Process

To be eligible for inclusion in this review, the articles had to be: (1) published in peer-reviewed journals; (2) published in the English language; (3) studies that analysed the phenomenon of slut-shaming and the psychosocial variables involved; (4) studies with a focus on early adolescents or young adults.
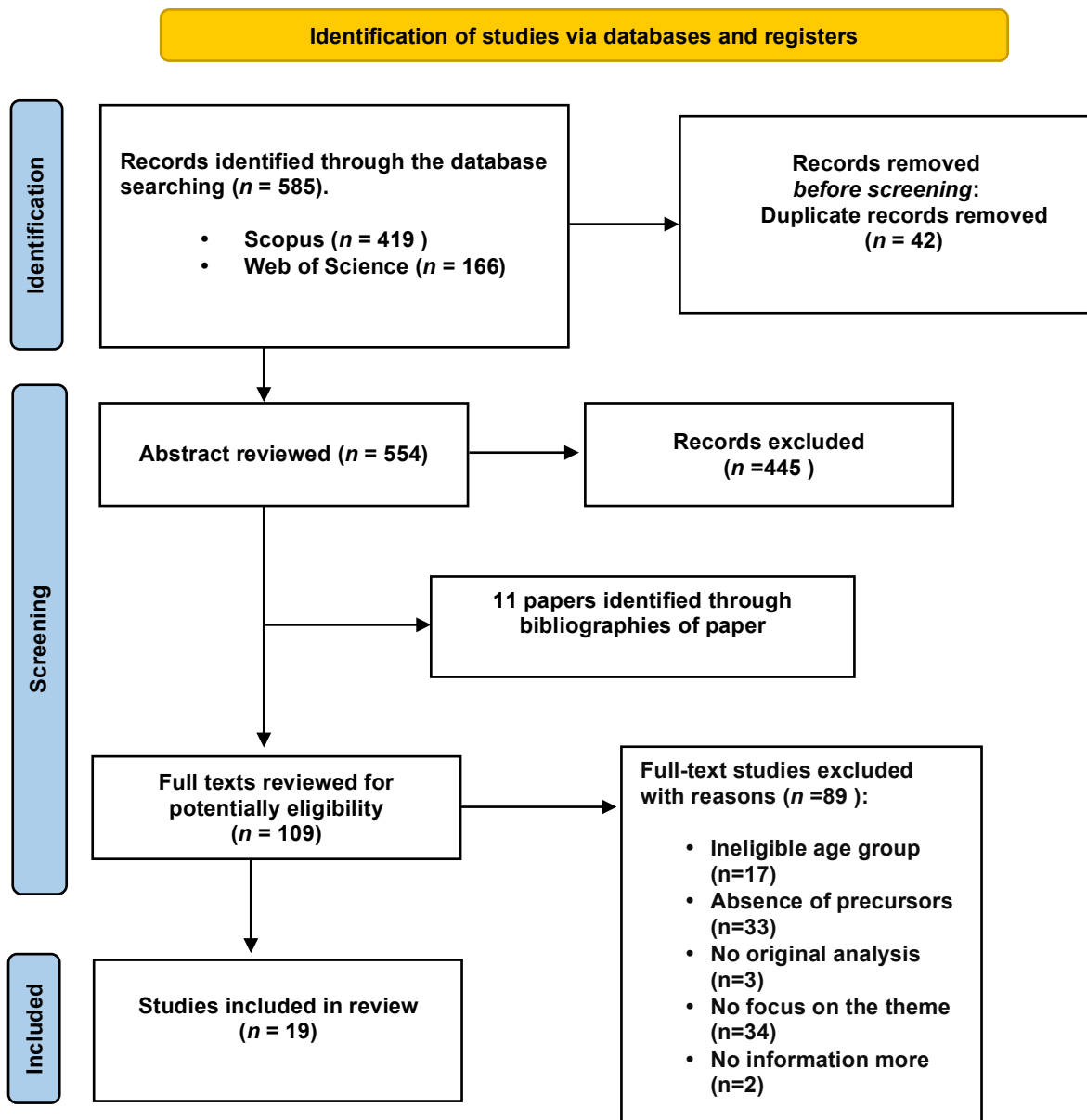
Identification of studies via databases and registers

Identification

Records identified through the database searching (*n* = 585).

- **Scopus (*n* = 419)**
- **Web of Science (*n* = 166)**

Records removed *before screening*: Duplicate records removed (*n* = 42)

Screening

Abstract reviewed (*n* = 554)

Records excluded (*n* =445)

11 papers identified through bibliographies of paper

Full texts reviewed for potentially eligibility (*n* = 109)

Full-text studies excluded with reasons (*n* =89):

- **Ineligible age group (n=17)**
- **Absence of precursors (n=33)**
- **No original analysis (n=3)**
- **No focus on the theme (n=34)**
- **No information more (n=2)**

Included

Studies included in review (*n* = 19)

Figure 1: PRISMA "Flow diagram of study selection and inclusion".

All the articles were exported to the bibliographic manager – we relied on the Mendeley tool – and duplicates were eliminated. The data were then gathered in an Excel file, reporting for each publication the following: authors, year of publication, title, journal, and DOIs; we also performed an initial screening.

After the elimination of duplicates, 554 abstracts were screened. We excluded records if the main topic was not in line with the aims of this review. Moreover, we included eleven articles found through other sources after searching through manually compiled bibliographies

The first selection was carried out by reading the titles and abstracts and then choosing the studies that seemed potentially interesting. Subsequently, 109 research articles were retained for full-text screening. The review of the full texts, applying our exclusion and inclusion criteria, supported the decision to retain 19 articles (Table 2), considered most eligible.

Table 2: Characteristics of Included Studies

Author	Country	Sample	Aim	Themes
.M., J.		lesbian n=1 (2%), bisexual n=1 (2%); Age: 18-21	While low-status girls need to pay more attention at regulating their sexual behavior and gender performance, the high-status Fem has this form of sexual privilege.	• Sexual double standards
aun, y, C.	New Zealand	N=15, all heterosexual Female; Age: 19-25.	Examine young heterosexual female's experiences of casual sex, compared to the sexual double standard. How double standards are involved in formulating female's wishes, experiences, and relationships.	• Sexual double standards
, ., & S.	Norway	N=41, Female, n=25 (61%); Male, n=16 (39%); Age:18-19.	Examine what happens to the sexual double standard during Norwegian high school graduation ceremony, which represents an event with exceptional liberal circumstances for young Female.	• Sexual double standards
, & F.	Belgium	N=605, all Female; lesbian n=12 (2%), bisexual n =33 (5%), heterosexual n=483 (80%), asexuality n=13 (2%), not sure n=36 (6%); Age:10-18.	Examine the impact of slut-shaming in virtual spaces… …on Female and wonders about the interaction among the values that girls integrates through their life experiences.	• Sexual double standards • Gender Norms

Author (Year)	Country	Sample	Aim	Norms
Kamke, K., Stewart, J. L., & Widman, L. (2021)	USA	N=50, all women; heterosexual (n=38); LGBTQ + (n=12); age: 12 -19.	Investigate adolescent girls' anticipated barriers to engaging in safer sex.	• Gender norms
Kreager, D.A., Staff, J., Gauthier, R., Lefkowitz, E.S., Feinberg (2016)	USA	N= 914; Female n=478 (52%), Male n=436 (48%) Age: 11–16.	Examine the within-person association between peer acceptance and sexual behaviors in a longitudinal sample of adolescents.	• Sexual double standards • Gender norms
Mayeza, E., Bhana, D., Mulqueeny, D. (2021)	South Africa	N= 33, all Female; Age: 15–17.	Examine how female participants relate to spaces at their school and how this comes to enable gendered power relations that subordinate Female through forms of gender violence, including sexual harassment, sexual coercion, and physical abuse.	• Gender norms
McDavitt, B., Mutchler, M.G. (2014)	USA	N=48; Gay Male n= 24 (50%); Heterosexual male n=11 (23%); Heterosexual female n=13 (27%). Age: 18-21.	Examine barriers, facilitators of sexual communication, and factors included in conversations that young gay men have with their peers, by examining gay-couple interviews with their friends. Understand how these factors function, how they affect the	• Sex norms

Country	Sample	Aim	Themes
USA	N= 186, all Female; heterosexual n=160 (86%); bisexual n=15 (8%), homosexual/gay/lesbian n=4 (2%), and "other" n=7 (4%); age: 18-25.	Examine how the use of this term affects perceptions of both "slut" and "shamer", and how clothing choice and social class of the targets, as well as feminist identity of the participant, affect these judgments.	• Sexual double standards • Gender norms
USA	N=308, Male 40 % (n = 123); Female 60 % (n = 185). Heterosexual (84 %), bisexual (7 %), homosexual/gay/lesbian (5 %), "other" (4 %). Age: 18-25.	Investigate sexual double standard and "slut-shaming" by asking participants to provide perceptions of both "slutshaming" and "shamer" targets.	• Sexual double standards • Gender norms
USA	N=49, Male n=36 (73%), Female n=13 (27%); Age:15-16.	Investigate through informal interviews the "fag" insult and its multiple meanings, which are primarily gendered, but also sexualized and raced.	• Sexual norms • Masculinity

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sexual agency.

, 1	USA	N=142; Male n=45 (32%) Female n=97 (68 %) Age: 18- 25.	Explore the possibility that female victims of bullying may be blamed for inviting persecution, especially if they portray themselves as sexually available. In such cases, evaluators will not take into account the level of harm caused to the victim.	• Sexual double standards • Gender Roles
., l, R., e, S.	UK	N=35, all Female, Age: 12 -15.	Explore gender inequities and sexual double standards in teens' digital image exchange (sexting).	• Sexual double standards • Moral norms
Z., E., 4)	USA	N=871, Male n=113 (25%) Female n= 758 (75%), heterosexual n=824 (95%), mostly heterosexual n=44 (5%), asexual n=3 (0.3%). Age: 18-23.	The focus is on nonsexual, same-sex friendships. In particular, how participant permissiveness moderates the expected negative effects of same-sex target permissiveness on several outcomes relevant to same-sex friendships. Analyze the existence of the double standard in same-sex friendships. Replicate and extend the findings of the negative main effects of target permissiveness on various aspects of friendship desirability.	• Sexual double standards

3. Results

The analysis of nineteen selected papers led us to identify two major psychosocial factors associated with slut-shaming: gender norms and sexual double standards.

A first correlation can be shown to exist between slut-shaming and gender norms conveyed by gender stereotypes. Gender norms are socially shared criteria about how women and men should be and behave. When women violate gender norms, they risk being exposed to slut-shaming (Payne, 2010; Papp et al., 2016; Goblet & Glowacz, 2021; Kamke et al., 2021). Female gender norms determine which behaviours are acceptable or unacceptable for women; whenever a girl or a woman transgresses gender norms she may be called a slut as a warning about her sexual conduct (Papp et al., 2016). Gender norms reinforce the slut/virgin dichotomy, even among young people (Williams, 2021), and so a girl who carries a condom with her could be easily labelled as a slut since she is considered sexually available. Moreover, according to gender stereotypes, those who exercise control over their own sexual behaviour, for example by acquiring condoms, are identified as males, in contrast with female stereotypes which expect women to be uninterested in sex and ignorant of it (Kreager et al., 2016). Indeed, instead of promoting sexual health, parents, significant adults and the broader society often tend to demonize and discourage it (Kamke, et al., 2021). In this way, a vicious circle is maintained: on one hand, slut-shaming is based on gender stereotypes and on the other hand gender stereotypes are reaffirmed and consolidated by slut-shaming (Goblet & Glowacz, 2021).

A second correlation concerns the relation between slut-shaming and sexual double standards that have a crucial role in perpetuating slut-shaming (Ringrose et al., 2013; Armstrong et al., 2014; Fjær, et al., 2015; Papp et al., 2015; Farvid, et al., 2016; Hackman et al., 2017; Willem, et al., 2019). According to one sexual double standard, men and women have identical or similar sexual behaviours but are judged by different criteria, which results in women's sexuality being considered disgraceful, while men's sexuality is prejudicially appreciated. Having casual sex or having multiple sexual partners, for instance, is considered acceptable for men, but is considered inadmissible for women since women's sexuality is stereotypically passive and is condoned only within a loving and stable relationship (Vrangalova et al., 2013; Farvid, et al., 2016; Williams, 2021). Whenever a girl or a woman violates gender norms, she is judged pursuant to a sexual double standard and, therefore, criticised, rejected and exposed to slut-shaming. Women may be judged for their sexual assertiveness, for affirming their sexual desires or for being sexually active in a way that infringes gender stereotypes, and they may then be exposed to social stigma; as a consequence, women whose sexual behaviours are not stereotypical seem to be more likely to be exposed to and vulnerable to slut-shaming (Vrangalova et al., 2013; Payne, 2010; Hackman et al., 2017).

Women who have been exposed to slut-shaming are systematically discouraged from speaking openly about their sexual experiences, and especially about casual sex, and sexual desires (Farvid, et al., 2016; Miller, 2016); furthermore, in order to safeguard their reputation and to avoid being exposed to slut-shaming, women are led to neglect their sexual desires (Payne, 2010; Farvid, et al., 2016; Williams, 2021; Miller, 2016; Pickel & Gentry, 2016; Hackman et al., 2017; Kamke, et al., 2021) or, at least, to express them solely with their partner. In this regard, slut-shaming has the social function of regulating *public performance of gender* (Armstrong et al., 2014).

The importance of this function is also confirmed by other studies (Vrangalova et al., 2013; Kreager et al., 2016; McDavitt & Mutchler, 2014) which show that peer relationships act as regulators for

sexual development, and they often transmit gender inequality through their discourses. Thus, for young girl abstinence is still a strategy used for maintaining social acceptance while boys are encouraged to lose their virginity early in order to pursue social success (Kreager et al., 2016).

Despite hypothetical statements regarding gender parity, even nowadays sexual double standards are maintained by the new generations; by focusing on young women and female adolescents, it can be seen that gender stereotypes and sexual double standards have a peculiar meaning and specific effects. Even in countries like Norway, despite the liberal socio-political context and the positive results obtained with regard to gender equality, sexual double standards still persist among young people and gender stereotypes have taken on new forms. Although girls and young women do not explicitly disapprove of sexual promiscuity, they avoid being promiscuous, claiming that they do so for the purpose of personal hygiene, privacy, modesty and to avoid risk, thereby giving proof of their self-control. By behaving in this way, sexual double standards influence young women's ways of thinking and lead them to draw "symbolic boundaries" between themselves and women who create scandal with their sexual behaviours (Fjær, et al., 2015; Miller, 2016). As Miller (2016) has highlighted, it is possible to distinguish between stereotypes of "normative" and "non-normative" desires, the latter understood as excessive, wrong and inappropriate. With regard to sexual behaviours, the terms lesbian and gay could also be used in a detrimental manner in regard to individuals, so that lesbian could be alternatively used with the same meaning of slut, just as fag is used for men. It should be noted that the labels lesbian and fag are addressed to individuals who have a promiscuous and deviant sexual behaviour that violate gender norms, regardless of the target's sexual orientation (Pascoe, 2005; Payne, 2010; McDavitt & Mutchler, 2014). Slut-shaming, indeed, originates from hegemonic masculinity and may affect everyone, regardless of their gender identity (Armstrong et al., 2014; Mayeza et al., 2021). Actually, even men may be exposed to slut-shaming when their sexual behaviours are deemed excessive according to gender stereotypes and women may consider them less attractive as potential partners and therefore reject them; in this case, men are exposed to a reverse sexual double standard, which involves less severe consequences (Papp et al., 2015), but still represents something warranting further investigation.

Another issue involving a sexual double standard is the question of which sexual desires should be considered natural (Miller, 2016); according to gender stereotypes, men are by nature prone to engage in sexual activity, whereas women tend by definition to refuse sexual experiences. In other words, sexual desire is only assigned to men and represents an exclusive privilege for them (Williams, 2021; Mayeza et al., 2021). Female sexual desire is evaluated in terms of women's ability to control it (Fjær, et al., 2015; Kreager et al., 2016; Mayeza et al., 2021). Therefore their sexual behaviours will be judged according to moral criteria, which are always disadvantageous for women. In other words, male and female sexuality are evaluated according to different moral criteria and men are not expected to control their sexual behaviours (Fjær, et al., 2015; Miller, 2016; Pickel & Gentry, 2016; Willem, et al., 2019).

4. Discussion

Slut-shaming is a form of labelling that targets individuals with certain sexual attitudes or behaviours with the aim of discrediting them. Individuals who have been slut-shamed may exhibit the negative effects of a stigmatization process. Slut-shaming has negative consequences both on the personal and social level. At an individual level, exposure to slut-shaming increases the

internalization of oppressive norms that, in turn, affect the process of identity construction; female sexual subjectivity is defined in terms of agency, the opportunity to experiment, safety, and the capacity to experience pleasure, at least as long as all that is disconnected from sexual desire (Williams, 2021; García-Gómez, 2022; Delgado Amaro et al., 2022).

On a social level, a bad reputation and ostracization are associated with various sexual, mental and physical symptoms, and also with an increased vulnerability to sexual abuse (Armstrong et al., 2014; Farvid, et al., 2016; Pickel & Gentry, 2016; Kamke, et al., 2021; Goblet & Glowacz, 2021).

The main aim of this paper was to identify psychosocial factors that facilitate the slut-shaming of adolescents and young adults; two precursors of slut-shaming were identified in gender norms and sexual double standards. With regard to gender norms, various authors (Connell, & Messerschmidt, 2005; Currier, 2013; Armstrong et al., 2014; Barton & Huebner, 2020) have highlighted the hegemonic status of a few specific masculine gender norms with which all forms of masculinity and femininity will be compared and often modelled after; the notion of hegemonic masculinity, proposed by Connell (1987, 1995) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), describes the most socially appreciated forms of masculinity, which is to say the normative standard for men. As a consequence, all others forms of masculinity that differ from the hegemonic performance are unrepresented, underpowered and subordinated to it. All individuals, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, find themselves confronted with gender stereotypes and the notion of heteronormativity. Just as girls must face slut-shaming experiences, boys and young male adults must deal with fag-discourse, which helps lay out a set of norms and criteria used to define stereotypical masculinity, and thus has a regulatory function of gender for males (Pascoe, 2005).

Adolescents and young adults tend to adhere to gender stereotypes and to avoid attitudes and behaviours that may increase the odds of being labelled a fag or a slut. Both slut-shaming and fag-discourse may be considered vehicles to convey gender norms and punish those who do not conform to them; moreover, both may have strong negative impacts on young people as they deal with heteronormative standards, regardless of whether they are homosexual or heterosexual (Pascoe, 2005; McDavitt & Mutchler, 2014). More specifically, it seems that girls and women who identify themselves with a homosexual orientation often suppress their identities and their desires in order to conform to the heteronormative standard of "the good girl": they continue to use the binary notion of the good/bad girl, they differentiate themselves from those who are labelled as sluts, but in drawing this boundary, they lose something of their authenticity: "as they participate in oppressing the slut, the icon of sexual agency, they participate in the demeaning of their own lesbian sexuality, in the regulation of all female sexuality, and they continue to feed the male-in-the-head" (Payne, 2010, p. 333).

Gender norms and sexual double standards are conveyed at various levels and by various institutions, so it can be difficult to recognize them and struggle against them; even sex education at school, for instance, may contribute to perpetuate precursors of slut-shaming and fag discourse by affirming that sexual desire is a male privilege and women have none, or stating that men are by nature active while women are by nature passive (Hackman et al., 2017; García-Gómez, 2022). Kamke, et al., (2021) have pointed out that socially shared sexual values are often contradictory, like when on one hand sexual freedom is encouraged, while on the other hand female sexuality is supposed to be passive. For this reason, girls and women may find it difficult to develop effective decision-making capacities with regard to their sexuality, where values are strongly dependent on social pressure and the opinions of others count more than their own; moreover, the lack of their own authentic values exposes female individuals, in turn, to a greater risk of manipulation (Kamke,

et al., 2021; Hamilton, & Armstrong, 2009). Even if a feminist identity may have protective effects, a risk still exists with regard to the persistence of traditional models of femininity based on patriarchal stereotypes leading to the devaluation of certain types of femininity, which may take the form of femmephobia (García-Gómez, 2022). Moreover, the progressive flattening of feminine models and the persistent adherence to gender-stereotypical norms, despite an ensuing sense of temporary relief, may cause loss of authenticity resulting in a hindrance to women's rights and gender equality (Barton & Huebner, 2020).

The analysis of the 19 articles included in this review leads us to give priority to certain pivotal recommendations. In order to prevent and avoid slut-shaming, gender awareness is seen as a protective factor (Ringrose & Renold 2012; Papp et al., 2016); in particular, a feminist identity leads women to encourage each other, rather than engaging in intra-sexual forms of oppression and competition (Ringrose & Renold 2012; Vaillancourt & Sharma, 2011; Armstrong et al., 2014). Accordingly, every occasion for solidarity can be identified as a protective factor which can help hinder slut-shaming: in April 2011, a 'SlutWalk' march was organized in Toronto after a police officer had commented on a sexual assault by asserting that it could have been prevented if women stopped dressing like sluts (Ringrose & Renold 2012). Feminist initiatives such as the 'SlutWalk' can have various positive effects. They can promote re-signification processes for terms like 'slut', foster solidarity bonds between women and men, and actively oppose stereotypical gender roles, including those related to being dressed like 'sluts' so as to increase the risk of being sexually assaulted or to 'get male attention' (Ringrose & Renold 2012; Armstrong et al., 2014; Willem, et al., 2019). An example of linguistic appropriation and a re-signification process of the term 'slut' within women of the same group, led to the use of this term with a positive meaning; in this way, sociocultural norms were overturned and its signification was inverted from derogatory to non-derogatory (Croom, 2013).

On a social level, sex education and relationship education (Thomas & Aggleton, 2016) courses should be introduced at all levels of school, with particular attention to the emotional aspects, to sexual behaviours and to sexual orientation; an overblown biological approach should be avoided in favour of an inclusive relational approach focused on all types of sexuality, gender identity and sexual orientation. Every occasion to reflect on gender and sexuality and discuss topics such as sexual pleasure and gender-related aspects would help deconstruct stereotypical gender norms and promote psychosocial wellbeing (Proulx et al., 2019; Kamke, et al., 2021). Moreover, since gender stereotypes have negative consequences for everyone, social interventions targeting gender and sexual discrimination may help to reduce vulnerability to slut-shaming; a supportive community should be promoted in order to sustain individuals as they cope both with internalized sexual oppression and labelling and ostracism (Herek, 2015; van Dam, 2014).

In a clinical context, efforts are required so that informed decisions are made whenever people exposed to slut-shaming seek help; in particular, the negative effects of slut-shaming should be recognized and protective factors should be fostered.

It should be noted that even if some impressive results have been identified, this work has some limitations. The main limitation is linked to the research topic itself as there are only a limited number of research studies on slut-shaming with samples consisting of adolescents and young adults. Another limitation concerns the prevalence of studies focused on female exposure to slut-shaming, compared to male exposure to fag discourse; it would be very important for future research to delve deeper into the dynamics related to slut-shaming behaviours and fag discourse exposure in males. It should be highlighted that most of the studies included in this review do not

take into account the consequences of slut-shaming exposure, which ought to be investigated by taking into account individual variables relating to age, gender and sexual orientation. For these reasons, future research should address both the causes and consequences of slut-shaming among LGBTQI+ youth (Goblet & Glowacz, 2021).

Moreover, since various authors (Papp et al., 2015; Papp et al., 2016; Miller, 2016; Willem, et al., 2019 Hunehäll Berndtsson & Odenbring, 2020; Goblet & Glowacz, 2021) have underlined that some social networks may facilitate slut-shaming discourse, the peculiarity of virtual spaces needs to be considered. In particular, the use of certain social media platforms by teenagers has to be identified as a risk factor (Setty, 2019; Ringrose et al., 2021). Likewise, a study by Hunehäll Berndtsson and Odenbring (2020) confirmed the existence of these moral double standards by analysing students' narratives of *sexting* (the practice of sending or receiving sexually explicit pictures or videos by private chat on a smartphone). Even if online interactions represent a crucial aspect of slut-shaming, it was only mentioned briefly in this review and further research would need to operationalize and analyse it (Papp et al., 2015; Papp et al., 2016).

To conclude, slut-shaming exposure is a widespread experience that can involve males, females, adolescents, young adults and adult individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, behaviour and appearance. Since slut-shaming may have severe negative effects on one's personal and social dimension, it is crucial to identify the protective factors that can mitigate and minimize the detrimental consequences thereof.

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