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Celebrity Appearance-Shaming: Innocent Bashing Forms or Reconfirming Gender Norms? A Study Into the Explanations of Adolescents' Celebrity Appearance-Shaming Intentions

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Abstract

Celebrities regularly become victims of online body- and slut-shaming. This study refers to these practices as appearance-shaming and investigates potential explanations for adolescents' intentions to participate in this behavior by means of an extended version of the theory of planned behavior (TPB). Apart from the three paths of attitudes toward the practice, subjective norms about the practice, and perceived behavioral control to participate in it, we added sexism as a potential variable to explain celebrity appearance-shaming. Through this addition, we were better able to capture the role of cultural background variables, something that was not included in the traditional elements of the TPB but appeared to be important for explaining normative behaviors. Based on a survey study of 248 adolescents (N = 248), we concluded that the TPB is a good theoretical framework for explaining intentions toward celebrity appearance-shaming. More specifically, having more accepting attitudes toward celebrity bashing, more supportive descriptive norms about celebrity bashing, and higher perceived behavioral control were associated with higher intentions. Moreover, sexism had a strong positive relationship with the intention to celebrity appearance-shaming. Participating in celebrity appearance-shaming might, in that way, be an indicator of strong traditional sexist beliefs and might contribute to keeping them alive among adolescents.

Keywords: celebrity body-shaming; slut-shaming; sexism; gender stereotyping; theory of planned behavior

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Introduction

Online celebrity bashing is a common practice on social media (Eronen, 2014; Ouvrein et al., 2021). Research indicates that many of these bashing cases take the form of publicly shaming (female) celebrities by writing or sharing negative content about their appearances (Ayuningtyas & Kariko, 2018; Eronen, 2014; Mitra, 2020; Ouvrein et al., 2021; Qamar et al., 2020). Indeed, recent evidence indicates that it only takes a few seconds to find an online comment calling a female celebrity too fat, too ugly, or too slutty (Eronen, 2014; Felmlee et al., 2018, 2020). This paper addresses this specific type of bashing and refers to it as celebrity appearance-shaming. We define the concept here as an online practice of public shaming or critiquing in which a celebrity is criticized on his/her appearance (physical or sexual; Gam et al., 2020). Similar to public-shaming cases of ordinary people, these

comments might hurt celebrities (Ayuningtyas & Kariko, 2018; Gam et al., 2020) and, in some cases, hinder their private and professional development and functioning (McMahon et al., 2022; Ouvrein et al., 2021). One difference, though, is that many adolescents are exposed to these public cases of celebrity appearance-shaming, as they massively follow their idols online and use features such as liking, sharing, and retweeting to contribute to spreading celebrity-bashing (Felmlee et al., 2018, 2020; Giles & Maltby, 2004). In particular, platforms such as Twitter and TikTok are known for serious cases of celebrity appearance-shaming, which appear to be trending for months (Felmlee et al., 2018, 2020; Omana, 2020). Despite the popularity of the practice among adolescents, knowledge of the perpetrators and potential explanations for this type of behavior is lacking. This study aims to explain adolescents' intentions to participate in celebrity appearance-shaming on TikTok on the individual (attitudes and perceived behavioral control), social (subjective norms), and cultural (sexism) levels by means of an extended version of the theory of planned behavior (TPB).

Increasing the knowledge of celebrity appearance-shaming is necessary because constant exposure to criticism of the beauty and sexuality of celebrities might function as a highlighter for existing gender stereotypical norms and social expectations, especially for women (Felmlee et al., 2020; Galdi et al., 2014; Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021). This information might, in turn, be used as a basis for people's own sexist values and behaviors toward famous and non-famous people, which might keep practices of appearance-shaming alive (Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2013; Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021; Moya et al., 2006; Ramiro-Sánchez et al., 2018).

Celebrity Bashing and Body-Shaming

Celebrities regularly become the subject of negative commenting and abuse on social media (Cohen, 2014; Eronen, 2014; Mitra, 2020), a trend referred to in the literature as online celebrity bashing. Celebrity bashing can take many different forms, ranging from mockery and public shaming, which are the most common (Eronen, 2014; Hamid et al., 2018; Johansson, 2015), to severe cases of identity theft and cancelation (Ouvrein et al., 2018). Online celebrity bashing has oftentimes been associated with cyberbullying (Ouvrein et al., 2018; Pyzalski, 2012), as the behavior seems to overlap on at least two of the three criteria of the definition of cyberbullying: "an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376). First, bashing cases very often involve the same celebrities, who are disproportionately female celebrities and celebrities with problematic backgrounds (e.g., addiction; cf. repetition criterion; Williamson, 2010). These celebrities indicated that they feel powerless in front of the massive online audience who are not forgiving toward them and the tabloid media that is constantly preying on new rumors (Gies, 2011; Ouvrein et al., 2021; cf. power imbalance). However, there are also differences between the two behaviors. Evidence on the third criterion of cyberbullying, harmful intention, is unclear. Several studies have reported a trend of online attacking and the abuse of celebrities as a way to vent (Ouvrein et al., 2021; Qamar et al., 2020). Eronen (2014) used the concept of "schadenfreude" in this context to describe how people enjoy the misfortunes of celebrities because it makes them feel better about their own lives (Cross & Littler, 2010). This behavior often develops as a result of envy toward celebrities (Fiske, 2011). In this way, the victimization of celebrities becomes a source of enjoyment (Eronen, 2014) and is not necessarily meant to hurt. Similarly, adolescents in Ouvrein et al.'s (2017) study referred to the practice as a means of entertainment and as harmless to the victim.

Moreover, in contrast to most cyberbullying cases, celebrity bashers do not know their victims in real life (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). As a result, online bashing is often oriented toward very accessible and observable characteristics, such as physical and sexual appearance, thus taking the form of celebrity appearance-shaming (Cohen, 2014; Felmlee et al., 2018). Appearance-shaming has been described as "the action of mocking or humiliating someone based on their physical appearance" (Gam et al., 2020, p. 1324). Body-shaming and slut-shaming are considered the most common sub-forms of appearance-shaming (Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021). Publicly shaming one's appearance is common among adolescents and happens both offline at school (Ashurst & McAlinden, 2015; Gam et al., 2020; Lestari, 2019; Lickteig, 2021) and on social media (Lestari, 2019). This practice has been associated with serious consequences for a victim's self-esteem, body surveillance, and self-objectification (Gam et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2022).

Based on existing research on celebrity appearance-shaming, we know that such cases are disproportionately targeted at female celebrities (Ayuningtyas & Kariko, 2018; Eronen, 2014; Mitra, 2020; Ouvrein et al., 2021). In a recent content analysis by Qamar et al. (2020), for instance, it was found that almost 7 out of 10 comments toward female celebrities on social media dealt with physical appearance. A large part of these contained severe forms of

bashing, body-shaming, and sexual objectification, especially when the celebrity did not meet traditional beauty standards (Qamar et al., 2020). Similarly, in an interview study by Ouvrein et al. (2021), female reality TV stars indicated that most of the online bashing was oriented at their physical appearance, whereas for male stars, the comments were more about banal things (e.g., something they did in the program). Concerning the tone and content of these comments, many appearance-shaming comments compare celebrities with other celebrities or even with food or animals in a sarcastic and mockery way (Hamid et al., 2018; Mitra, 2020). Such types of celebrity appearance-shaming incidents have been observed across different platforms, such as Instagram (Ayuningtyas & Kariko, 2018; Hamid et al., 2018), Twitter (Demirhan & Çakır Demirhan, 2015; Felmlee et al., 2018, 2020), and, recently, TikTok (Omana, 2020; Strapagiel, 2020).

Due to the interactive features of social media, such as liking, sharing, and retweeting, insulting comments about the physical and sexual appearances of celebrities have become widespread (Felmlee et al., 2018, 2020) and reach large groups of adolescents who massively follow these celebrities online (Bond, 2016; Felmlee et al., 2020). In contrast to comments about ordinary people, celebrity comments can continue to be trending on social media for months and are even picked up by news sources who keep them alive (Broersma & Graham, 2013; Felmlee et al., 2020). Several scholars have warned of how such popular comments might contribute to the maintenance of traditional sexual ideas about women and their appearance (Felmlee et al., 2018, 2020; Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021).

Theory of Planned Behavior

Despite the prevalence and spread of celebrity appearance-shaming on social media, no previous research has investigated the potential explanations for this behavior. Based on two studies conducted on celebrity bashing in general, we know that both individual and social factors may steer this behavior (Ouvrein et al., 2017, 2018). More specifically, it has been found that accepting attitudes toward celebrity bashing and the supportive social norms of peers and favorite celebrities are related to higher participation in celebrity bashing and cyberbullying toward peers (Ouvrein et al., 2018, 2021). Given the known importance of these two elements for general celebrity bashing, this study proposes to use the TPB as the theoretical framework to explain intentions to participate in celebrity appearance-shaming. This theoretical model is also considered useful for explaining intentions in (cyber)bullying among adolescents, a related behavior, as discussed above (Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014; Salmivalli, 1999; Tokunaga, 2010). The TPB, originally developed by Ajzen and Fishbein, consists of three paths that together explain people's intentions and involvement in specific behaviors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991).

The first path of the model represents attitudes toward the targeted topic and is defined as "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). It is generally considered that a person's attitude toward something is a predictor of his/her intentions and, in turn, actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Indeed, several studies in the context of cyberbullying have reported that having accepting attitudes is a strong predictor of the intention to cyberbully and of actual cyberbullying perpetration (e.g., Auemanekul et al., 2020; Barlett et al., 2017; Boulton et al., 2012; Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). In a couple of these studies, attitudes were the strongest predictors of all three paths of the TPB (Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). According to Pabian and Vandebosch (2014), this can be explained by the underlying belief that cyberbullying is a good way to vent and feel better, an idea that also exists for celebrity bashing (Johansson, 2015). Celebrity bashing is seen as a safer and funnier way to vent than cyberbullying, as the chances that the celebrity victim will respond are very low (Ouvrein et al., 2018; Peng et al., 2015; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). Based on this and the fact that celebrity appearance-shaming very often has a mockery and sarcastic tone (Hamid et al., 2018; Mitra, 2020), which might signal accepting attitudes (Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014), we can expect a positive relationship between having accepting attitudes toward celebrity appearance-shaming and adolescents' intentions to participate in it (**H1**).

The second determinant of the TPB is the subjective norm toward the practice. At the broadest level, norms refer to shared standards, rules, and expectations for how individuals should behave in certain circumstances (Coleman, 1990). People pick up these norms by observing significant others, such as their peers and parents (Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). Research has linked more accepting subjective norms with higher intentions and participation in aggressive behavior (e.g., Auemanekul et al., 2020; Doane et al., 2014; Festl et al., 2015; Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). However, the literature increasingly marks the importance of distinguishing between two types of subjective norms: injunctive norms, which describe what significant others

think of the behavior and thus give information on how people should act (Cialdini et al., 1990; Rimal & Lapinski, 2015), and descriptive norms, which, in contrast, refer to perceptions of what significant others do (Cialdini et al., 1990). Several existing studies using the TPB have not included descriptive norms. Nevertheless, this determinant can increase the explained variance of risky behavior in particular among adolescents considerably (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003). When comparing both types of norms in predicting cyberbullying, conflicting results have been found, with some studies reporting that injunctive norms have a stronger influence (e.g., Bastiaensens et al., 2016; Martins et al., 2018; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014), others indicating that descriptive norms are the most important (e.g., Lazuras et al., 2013; Ouvrein et al., 2018), and still others reporting the importance of both (e.g., Dang & Liu, 2020). One study investigated the role of norms in explaining celebrity bashing and found that the descriptive norms of peers and favorite celebrities were related to bashing behavior, whereas injunctive norms were not (Ouvrein et al., 2018). Following the findings of the latter study (Ouvrein et al., 2018), which is most closely related to ours, it can be expected that more accepting descriptive norms are related to a higher intention to participate in celebrity appearance-shaming (**H2**). For injunctive norms, we are not able to formulate a hypothesis because there is not enough knowledge on how they operate within the context of celebrity behavior. Therefore, we used an open question to test whether there was an association between injunctive norms and the intention to celebrity appearance-shaming (**RQ1**).

The third determinant in the TPB is perceived behavioral control, which can be defined as “the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). With regard to celebrity appearance-shaming, anonymity online and the large perceived distance might play roles in determining perceived behavioral control (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Ouvrein et al., 2018). Due to the combination of these two elements, perpetrators know that the chances are low that there will be consequences of their behavior, which might lead to higher intentions to indulge in appearance-shaming. Indeed, research has found positive significant relationships between perceived behavioral control and intentions and actual cyberbullying behavior (Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). Therefore, we also expected a positive association with celebrity appearance-shaming (**H3**).

One criticism of the TPB is that the model does not pay enough attention to individual differences in personal background variables (Ajzen, 2011). Several authors have shown that stable individual factors influence the relative weights of the different predictors in the model (Ajzen, 2011). Therefore, some scholars have expanded the original theory to include, for instance, cultural factors and personal values (e.g., Lee et al., 2006; Lin et al., 2021). Based on meta-analyses of the use of the theory, these additions appear to be particularly important when examining behaviors with moral dimensions in which one must balance out personal rewards (cf. feeling better about your own life, *schadenfreude*) with external consequences (cf. harm to the victim; Armitage & Conner, 2001). For subjective norms in particular, it has been argued that this concept mostly captures one’s global perceptions of social pressures to participate in a moral behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and that it is beneficial to complement it with variables measuring individual cultural values to better explain the normative aspect (Ajzen, 2011; Armitage & Connor, 2001). Therefore, we aim to expand the celebrity appearance-shaming model drawn from TPB with the individual factor of sexism.

Extension to the Theory: Sexism and Gender Stereotypes

Research has reported that sexism might play a role in determining both cyber and sexual aggression perpetration (Bandura & Bussey, 2004; Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2013; De Judicibus & McGabe, 2001; Galdi et al., 2014). According to feminist theories, aggression toward women is highly steered by our culture and characterized by widespread attitudes of sexism and objectification of women (Jeffreys, 2005).

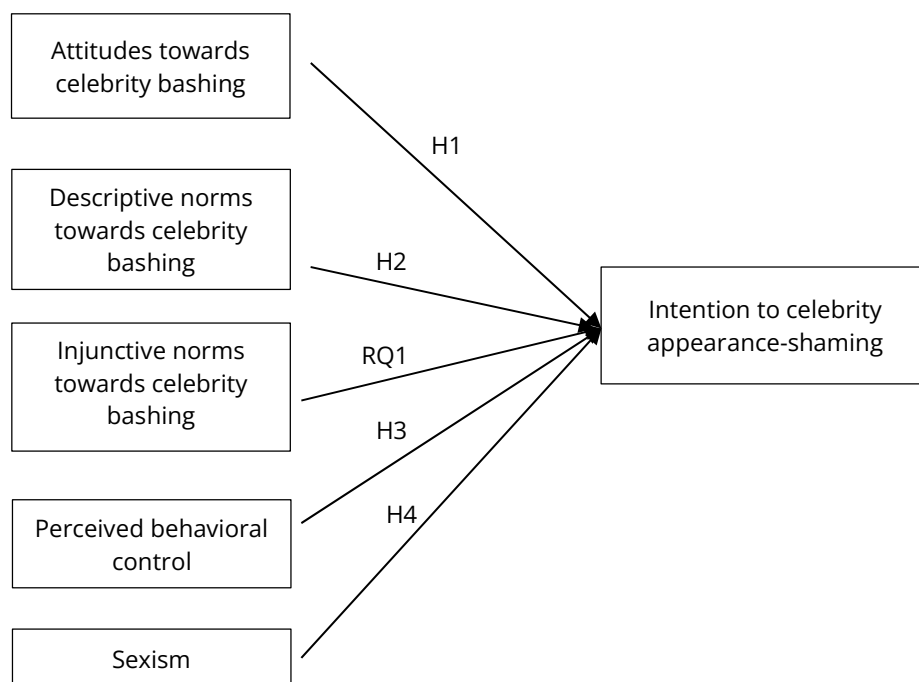
Sexism is a complex phenomenon that has been conceptualized in different ways. Ramiro-Sánchez et al. (2018) grouped the conceptualizations into two categories. Traditional conceptualizations define sexism as a way of discriminating against women (Cameron, 1977). Sexism then refers to beliefs that recognize differences in roles between both sexes, with an emphasis on the superiority of men (Moya et al., 2006). In addition, the concept of hostile sexism (i.e., beliefs that are openly hostile toward people based on gender) is classified as a traditional conceptualization (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The more innovative conceptualizations, though, define new and more subtle forms of sexism, such as benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), which describes attitudes toward women based on a stereotypical view of women but not necessarily with a negative tone (Glick & Fiske, 1996). In line with this, Forbes et al. (2007) described sexism as “the assignment of roles and privileges as a function of gender” (p. 266). These conceptualizations recognize the more subtle and undercover forms of sexism today (Rodríguez,

2010). Especially on social media, where people can anonymously express their thoughts, many cases of subtle sexism can be found. In an analysis on Twitter, for instance, Deminar and Çakır Demirhan (2015) analyzed tweets with the hashtag “women should be,” which had been trending for a couple of months in Turkey. Almost all tweets (93%) contributed to stereotypical ideas about what women should be. The second largest category dealt with the physical appearance of women. Several scholars have also found support for sexist values among adolescents (e.g., Carrera-Fernandez et al., 2013; Soto et al., 2011) and have argued for more research on the connection between such attitudes and behaviors among adolescents (Galambos et al., 1985).

People develop and adapt their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors based on the dominant images that they observe around them. In this context, regular confrontation with sexist ideas in the environment can steer people’s attitudes and behaviors toward men and women (Felmlee et al., 2019; Forbes et al., 2007; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). Accordingly, several studies have found evidence that sexism plays a role in justifying and implementing different norms, expectations, and treatments for women (Forbes et al., 2007)—and this is true among both men and women (Shen et al., 2012; Wilhelm & Joeckel, 2019). One of the gendered norms strongly embedded in Western culture is the idea that women should be physically attractive (Felmlee et al., 2019). This norm is further reinforced by the fact that women who do not meet these norms might be punished by society, for instance, in the form of aggression or commenting (Faris & Felmlee, 2011; Wilhelm & Joeckel, 2019). Several scholars have found significant associations between adherence to beauty ideals, sexism, and sexual hostility toward women (Forbes et al., 2007; Shen et al., 2012; Swami et al., 2010). Similar findings have been found for sexual objectification (i.e., focusing on women’s appearances and ignoring their personalities), which is typically associated with a strong adherence to the beauty ideals of women (Xiao & Wang, 2021). Research has shown that people scoring high on sexual objectification of women show higher acceptance of rape myths and participate more often in negative behaviors toward women (Samji & Vasquez, 2020), such as public-shaming, sexual harassment, and aggression (Forbes et al., 2007; Franz et al., 2016; Gervais et al., 2014; Swami et al., 2010). By constantly stressing sexist ideas and attacking women who do not meet the standards, such comments become powerful messages (Bailey et al., 2013; Eagly et al., 2000) and contribute to the continuing acceptance of these norms (Eagly et al., 2000; Endendijk et al., 2017; Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021).

By applying these ideas to the context of celebrity appearance-shaming, it might thus be expected that having sexist values would also translate into a higher intention to participate in celebrity appearance-shaming (**H4**). An overview of the conceptualized model can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptualized Model.



Methods

Sample

To investigate our hypotheses and research question, an online survey was developed with Qualtrics and pretested among a sample of six adolescents. After some small adaptations in the wording, the link to the final sample was spread on social media. Adolescents between 14 and 18 years old could participate in the study, as this is the age at which celebrity interest peaks and adolescents massively follow celebrities on social media (Chia & Poo, 2009). Recent findings indicate that adolescents are exposed to cases of celebrity bashing every two weeks (Ouvrein et al., 2023). This high exposure might make adolescents more likely to experiment with this kind of behavior (Ouvrein et al., 2023).

The participants were recruited using a convenience sample on social media. A total of 248 adolescents ($N = 248$) with an average age of 15.99 ($SD = 1.32$) years participated in the study (71% female). All of them spoke Dutch, and almost all of them had the Belgian nationality. Except for one, all the participants were students. Most students were following courses in either *general secondary education* (42.3%) or *technical secondary education* (36.3%). The participants needed to have an account on TikTok to be able to participate. After giving informed consent, the participants filled out an online survey. The study design was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Antwerp. The data was collected during spring 2021.

Measurements

Exposure to TikTok was measured by asking the participants how often they scrolled on TikTok on a scale from *never* (1) to *several times per day* (7). This variable was included as a control variable because desensitization theory states that regular exposure to body-shaming and other forms of online aggression might impact attitudes and reactions to it (Pabian et al., 2016; Rule & Ferguson, 1986).

Next, the adolescents were given a definition of online celebrity bashing (cf. "Online attacking or ridiculing of famous people"), which they needed to keep in mind to answer questions about attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The reliability of these items and scales was evaluated based on Cronbach's alpha, factor structure, inter-item and item-total correlations.

Attitudes was operationalized as the extent to which the participants believed the practice of celebrity appearance-shaming was acceptable. These attitudes toward acceptability were measured using a semantic differential scale with seven items (*bad/good*, *unpleasant/nice*, *boring/exciting*, *cowardly/brave*, *not funny/funny*, *childish/grown-up*, and *harmful for the celebrity/unharmful for the celebrity*). This scale was based on a semantic differential scale used to measure attitudes toward cyberbullying (Heirman & Walrave, 2012), a behavior that is related to online celebrity bashing. The participants indicated for each of the items the extent to which they perceived online celebrity bashing. Based on exploratory factor analyses, it appeared that the total score could be determined as the mean score of the seven items (higher score = more accepting, $\alpha = .86$, average inter-item correlation = .48). Table 1 provides an overview of the items, factor loadings, and item-total correlations.

Table 1. Overview of Items, Factor Loadings, and Item-Total Correlations for Attitudes Toward Celebrity Bashing.

Items	Factor loading	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
Bad/good	.86	6.19	1.36	.76	.82
Unpleasant/nice	.88	5.73	1.74	.79	.81
Boring/exciting	.70	5.19	1.89	.57	.85
Cowardly/brave	.79	6.18	1.37	.67	.84
Not funny/funny	.86	5.25	1.90	.77	.82
Childish/grown-up	.56	5.78	1.80	.49	.86
Harmful/harmless	.51	5.56	1.79	.42	.87

Note. This table represents the answers to the question *I believe the attacking of celebrities on TikTok is...* on a semantic differential scale with 10 points; exploratory factor analysis suggested making one factor with explained variance 56.77% and Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$.

Subjective norms refer to one's perceptions of what others are thinking and doing regarding celebrity appearance-shaming. To measure subjective norms, we distinguished between descriptive and injunctive norms. For the descriptive norms, the participants indicated whether their friends/parents/important people in their lives participated in forms of online celebrity bashing on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *totally disagree* (1) to *totally agree* (7). For the injunctive norms, the participants indicated whether their friends/parents/important people in their lives would not mind if they bashed celebrities online on the same 7-point Likert scale. The total score for descriptive norms and injunctive norms was calculated by summing up the separate items of the three reference groups (higher score = higher participation and higher acceptability; α descriptive norm = .74, average inter-item correlation = .49, α injunctive norm = .80, average inter-item correlation = .58). Table 2 provides an overview of the items, factor loadings, and item-total correlations.

Table 2. Overview of the Items, Factor Loadings, and Item-Total Correlations.

Items	Factor loading descriptive norms	Factor loading injunctive norms	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
1. My friends would not mind if I bashed celebrities on TikTok.		.86	3.37	1.86	.67	.71
2. My parents would not mind if I bashed celebrities on TikTok.		.80	2.19	1.61	.59	.79
3. The people who are most important to me would not mind if I bashed celebrities on TikTok.		.88	2.79	1.86	.70	.67
4. My friends have already bashed celebrities on TikTok.	.85		3.37	1.98	.63	.58
5. My parents have already bashed celebrities on TikTok.	.72		1.70	1.41	.46	.77
6. The people who are most important to me have already bashed celebrities on TikTok.	.86		2.30	1.77	.64	.55

Note. Exploratory factor analysis suggested to make one factor for descriptive norms with explained variance 65.95% and one factor for injunctive norms with explained variance 71.71%.

Perceived behavioral control refers to the extent to which a person believes he/she is able to participate in the behavior—in this case, celebrity appearance-shaming. This variable was captured using three items measuring the extent to which the participants thought they could participate in direct forms of celebrity bashing (directly and publicly to the celebrity), indirect bashing (e.g., in comment sections of news sites), and bashing in a private context (e.g., celebrity bashing in private conversations). The participants answered these questions on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *totally disagree* (1) to *totally agree* (7). The total score was calculated using the mean score of the three items (higher score = higher capability, α = .76, average inter-item correlations = .54). Table 3 provides an overview of the items, factor loadings, and item-total correlations.

Table 3. Items, Factor Loadings, and Item-Total Correlations for Perceived Behavioral Control.

Items	Factor loading	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item- total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
1. I consider myself capable of placing a mean comment on the TikTok account of a celebrity.	.87	2.35	1.68	.64	.61
2. I consider myself capable of bashing a celebrity in a private message.	.76	3.81	2.06	.52	.80
3. I consider myself capable of publicly bashing a celebrity (publicly = where everyone can see it).	.87	1.83	1.37	.66	.63

Note. Exploratory factor analysis suggested to make one factor for perceived behavioral control with explained variance 69.73% and Cronbach's α = .76.

Sexism was measured using the Attitudes Towards Women Scale. The scale was originally developed by Spence and Helmrich (1972) and later adapted and used among adolescents to measure beliefs about women in education, employment, and social roles (Galambos et al., 1985). This scale consists of 15 items answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *totally disagree* (1) to *totally agree* (5). The total score was calculated as the mean score across the items (α = .83, average inter-item correlations = .26, higher score = more traditional sexist values). Table 4 provides an overview of the items, factor loadings, and item-total correlations.

Table 4. Items, Factor Loadings, and Item-Total Correlations for Sexism.

Items	Factor loading	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
1. A girl who is cursing is worse than a boy who is cursing.	.63	1.65	0.98	.52	.82
2. It is up to the boy to pay on a date.	.50	2.13	1.16	.41	.82
3. Girls are as smart as boys. (R)	.48	2.00	1.17	.39	.82
4. Parents should stimulate boys more to continue studying than girls.	.43	2.14	1.18	.35	.83
5. It is no problem that girls play rough sports, such as football. (R)	.46	1.49	1.05	.39	.82
6. In general, men should make decisions at home.	.75	1.53	0.87	.65	.81
7. It is not weird that a girl asks a boy on a date. (R)	.38	1.75	1.12	.30	.83
8. Having good grades at school is more important for boys than for girls.	.59	1.50	0.76	.48	.82
9. When both the man and the woman have a job, they must both help at home. (R)	.45	1.48	0.89	.37	.82
10. Boys are better leaders than girls.	.59	1.90	1.68	.48	.82
11. Girls are more focused on family life than on their careers.	.56	2.48	1.11	.48	.82
12. Boys and girls should have the same rights. (R)	.57	1.28	0.75	.48	.82
13. Only boys can tell dirty jokes.	.77	1.57	0.76	.68	.81
14. Most girls interpret innocent remarks as sexism.	.45	2.77	1.11	.36	.83
15. Boys are smarter than girls.	.74	1.63	0.92	.63	.81

Note. Exploratory factor analysis suggested to make one factor for sexism with explained variance 32.37% and Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$; the items with (R) were reverse coded; the means that are mentioned for these items are already reversed again to make the interpretation easier.

Table 5. Items, Factor Loadings, and Item-Total Correlations for Intention to Participate in Celebrity Appearance-Shaming.

Items	Factor loading	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Corrected item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
1. Calling a celebrity on TikTok gay or lesbian in a negative way.	.84	1.43	1.19	.76	.99
2. Sharing embarrassing pictures or videos of a TikTok celebrity.	.82	1.58	1.21	.55	.90
3. Adapting pictures or videos of a TikTok celebrity in an embarrassing way.	.82	1.42	1.08	.56	.90
4. Commenting negative things about the physical appearance of a TikTok celebrity.	.84	1.82	1.31	.59	.90
5. Sharing sexualized pictures or videos of a TikTok celebrity.	.81	1.36	1.04	.56	.91
6. Calling a TikTok celebrity a whore or something similar.	.90	1.50	1.16	.73	.89

Note. These items contain the answers to the question *What is the chance that you will participate in the following behaviors in the next six months?*; exploratory factor analysis suggested to make one factor for intentions to participate in celebrity appearance-shaming with explained variance 70.32% and Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$.

Intention to participate in celebrity appearance-shaming on TikTok was measured using six different types of celebrity bashing behaviors, with a focus on sexual and physical appearance, which can be performed on TikTok. We decided to focus on TikTok because the platform increasingly comes under the attention of serious cases of body-shaming (Omana, 2020; Strapagiel, 2020) and is extremely popular among adolescents, but no previous research has included it. The items were selected from a combination of celebrity bashing behavior scales (Ouvrein et al., 2018) and slut-shaming scales (Van Royen et al., 2018). Some examples of behaviors included writing negative comments about the physical appearance of a celebrity, calling a celebrity a slut, etc. The participants indicated for each behavior their intention to participate in the next six months on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from *very unlikely* (1) to *very likely* (7). Exploratory factor analysis indicated that the total intention could be

calculated as the mean score of the different items ($\alpha = .91$, average inter-item correlation = .64). Table 5 provides an overview of the items, factor loadings, and item-total correlations.

Results

Descriptive Results

An overview of the descriptive statistics and correlations can be found in Table 6. The participants' attitudes were rather unaccepting, with a mean lower than the middle of the scale ($M = 1.30$, $SD = 1.25$). Similarly, the average scores for descriptive ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.41$) and injunctive norms ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.51$) were just below the middle of the scale, indicating that peers, parents, and significant others were not very supportive of celebrity bashing. Perceived behavioral control was rather low, meaning that the participants did not think they were able to participate in these kinds of behaviors ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.41$). Sexism was also rather low, which indicates that the participants disagreed with traditional stereotypical gender ideas ($M = 1.81$, $SD = 0.55$). Lastly, the intention to perform celebrity appearance-shaming in the next six months was low ($M = 1.51$, $SD = 0.97$). The intention was the highest for writing a mean comment about the physical appearance of a celebrity on social media (indirect), with 8% of the participants indicating that the chances of them doing that were moderate to high in the next few months.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Sex								
2. TikTok exposure	.02							
3. Sexism	-.49***	.06						
4. Attitude	.34***	-.18*	-.51***					
5. Descriptive norms	-.14*	.16*	.14*	.30***				
6. Injunctive norms	-.30***	.21**	.23**	.51***	.49***			
7. Perceived behavioral control	-.39***	.11	.35***	.58***	.41***	.55***		
8. Intention	-.44***	.07	.58***	-.58***	.36***	.39***	.62***	
<i>M</i>		4.78	1.81	1.30	2.46	2.78	2.66	1.51
<i>SD</i>		0.55	0.55	1.25	1.41	1.51	1.41	0.97
Range		1–5	1–5	1–7	1–7	1–7	1–7	1–7

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Hierarchical Multiple Regressions

To test our hypotheses and research question, hierarchical multiple regressions were performed using SPSS 24.0. In Block 1, we entered the control variables of sex and TikTok exposure. Next, as predicted by H1–3, the three elements of the TPB—attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—were included in the model. Lastly, the third block completed the model with sexism (H4). All variables were tested for multicollinearity using the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance. As suggested by Field (2009), all the variables demonstrated by the VIF should be less than 10, and the tolerance values should be above 0.2, which was the case. Thus, there was no evidence of multicollinearity, and we could interpret the model. The model fit was significant: $F(7,150) = 28.06$, $p < .001$ and explained 56.7% of the variance in intentions to perform celebrity appearance-shaming. More specifically, the explained variance significantly increased from 19.7% (Block 1) when the hypothesized predictors were added.

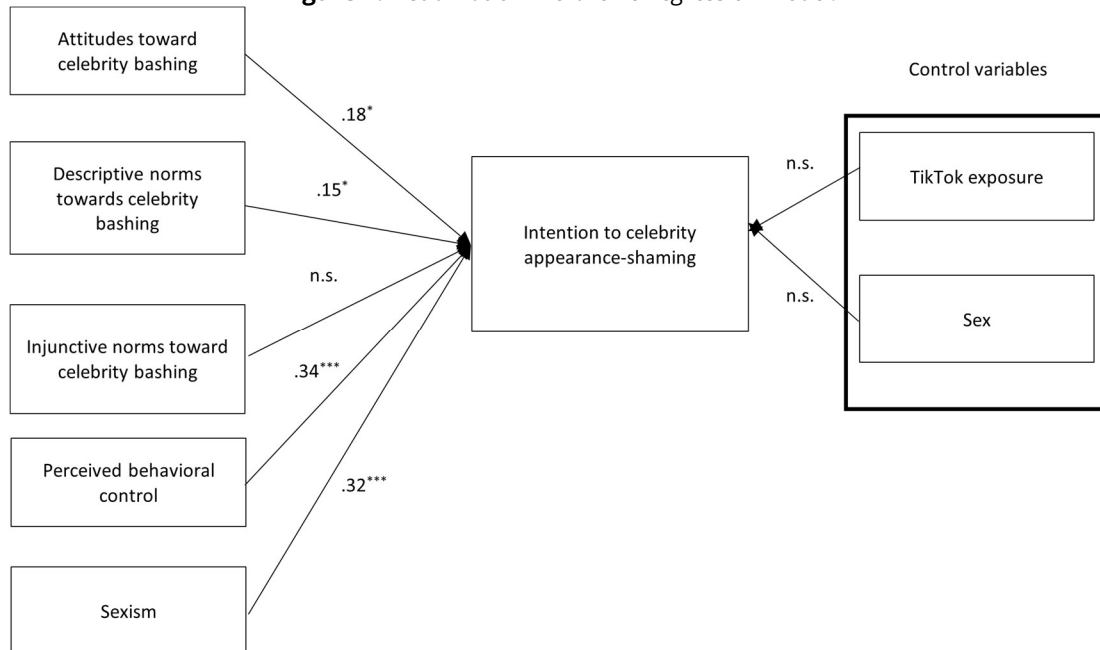
The model fit, explained variance, and standardized coefficients for the model can be found in Table 7. A visualization of the results can be found in Figure 2. The results of Model 3 (including all variables) indicate that the two control variables had no effect on the outcome variable. The three elements of the TPB were significantly related to the intention: attitudes ($\beta = .18$, $p = .017$), descriptive norm ($\beta = .15$, $p = .023$), and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$). Injunctive norms were not related to intention. Lastly, sexism had a positive significant relationship with the intention ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$), indicating that the participants who have more traditional sexist values have a higher intention to participate in celebrity appearance-shaming.

Table 7. Hierarchical Regression Analysis.

	Intention to celebrity appearance-shaming			
	Model fit	R^2	ΔR^2	β
Model 1	$F(2, 155) = 19.06, p < .001$			
Block 1: Control variables		.197		
Sex				-.44***
TikTok exposure				.08
Model 2	$F(6, 151) = 29.86, p < .001$			
Block 1: Control variables		.504	.306***	
Sex				-.20**
TikTok exposure				-.03
Block 2: TPB (H1-3)				
Attitudes				.32***
Descriptive norms				.15*
Injunctive norms				-.10
Perceived behavioral control				.35***
Model 3	$F(7, 150) = 28.06, p < .001$			
Block 1: Control variables		.567	.063***	
Sex				-.08
TikTok exposure				-.03
Block 2: TPB (H1-3)				
Attitudes				.18***
Descriptive norm				.15*
Injunctive norm				-.06
Perceived behavioral control				.34***
Block 2: Gender stereotyping (H4)				
Sexism				.32***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; β represents standardized coefficients.

Figure 2. Visualization Hierarchic Regression Model.



Note. Values reflect standardized coefficients. The total explained variance for intention to celebrity appearance-shaming is 56.7%. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; for the sake of clarity of the figure, the correlations between the independent variables are not included.

Discussion

This study tested an extended version of the TPB in the context of celebrity appearance-shaming among adolescents. More specifically, we investigated the relationship between the intention to perform celebrity appearance-shaming and some variables on the individual (attitudes and perceived behavioral control), social (descriptive and injunctive norms), and cultural levels (sexism).

First, the results of the study indicate that our participants' intentions to celebrity appearance-shame on TikTok in the next six months were low. Writing negative comments about the physical appearance of a celebrity had the highest scores. These intentions seem to differ based on related variables. All elements of the TPB—attitudes, descriptive norms, and perceived behavioral control—were associated with the intention to celebrity appearance-shame in the direction we expected, which confirms H1–3. More specifically, having more accepting attitudes toward celebrity bashing, having more people around you who also participate in it, and believing that you are able to perform this type of behavior resulted in higher intentions toward celebrity appearance-shaming. These results correspond with findings for cyberbullying (Auemaneekul et al., 2020; Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). However, whereas these studies reported attitudes and subjective norms as the most important variables in the theoretical framework, perceived behavioral control had the strongest associations in our model. This can be explained by the fact that the circumstances in which celebrities are being appearance-shamed are even “easier” compared to cyberbullying. Not only can you perform the behavior anonymously, but the chances that the celebrity will come after you are also very low because they receive so many comments (Ouvrein et al., 2018; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). Moreover, celebrity bashing appears to be morally OK, as in many cases, celebrities are considered responsible for the comments they receive, or at least it is seen as the price they pay for being famous (Ouvrein et al., 2017). The more adolescents are aware of this, the more they might increase their intention to perform celebrity appearance-shaming.

Concerning the role of norms, previous findings on the importance of injunctive versus descriptive norms were unclear. This study found that descriptive norms were related to intention, whereas injunctive norms were not. In this way, we follow the findings of Ouvrein et al. (2018), who explained celebrity bashing behavior. This means that some suggestions or observations of people in the environment were enough to influence the participants' intentions. This might have to do with the fact that descriptive norms are quite salient in the context of celebrity appearance-shaming. Previous research has indicated that one of the celebrity bashing behaviors that adolescents are most often exposed to is the sharing of negative and embarrassing celebrity content by others (Ouvrein et al., 2023). As adolescents spend quite some time scrolling on social media and observing what others are doing online, such behaviors provide good insights into the celebrity appearance-shaming behaviors of people in their immediate environment (Bullo & Schulz, 2022). The fact that injunctive norms were not related to adolescents' intentions could be explained by the fact that these are less salient (you need to talk to people to be sure what they think about it) and are therefore considered less reliable in making decisions about one's own intentions (Bullo & Schulz, 2022). A second explanation was reported in the study of Fikkers et al. (2016), in which it was found that injunctive norms more often play a mediating role between descriptive norms and aggression than a direct role.

Next, it was discovered that cultural beliefs also played a role. More specifically, a significant relationship was found between the intention to celebrity appearance-shaming and sexism. Adolescents with stronger sexist values were indicated to be more likely to participate in online celebrity appearance-shaming, which confirms H4. These results follow the lines of previous research on sexism, which has been linked to more negative behavior and sexual aggression toward women in general (Forbes et al., 2007; Franz et al., 2016; Gervais et al., 2014; Swami et al., 2010). As this association is quite strong in our study, it might indicate that expectations and norms concerning the physical and sexual appearance of those who already have sexist values are very strong toward famous people—maybe even stronger compared to ordinary people. The underlying reasons for why people are so hard on the physical appearance of celebrities can be found in the public function of celebrities and the fact that they represent the social and physical ideals that people admire (Giles & Maltby, 2004). Their attractiveness forms the basis of idealized standards of beauty (Swami et al., 2009).

Lastly, exposure to TikTok did not contribute to the model, although the average exposure was high. This contradicts the desensitization idea, which states that when being regularly exposed to aggressive behavior, one becomes less sensitive toward it, which can result in more accepting attitudes and even higher intentions to perform similar behavior (Pabian et al., 2016; Rule & Ferguson, 1986). It is possible that although the general use

of TikTok was high here, our participants were not often exposed to appearance-shaming cases on TikTok, which would explain why desensitization effects were not observable. To increase the insights into this, it will be necessary to include exposure to appearance-shaming on TikTok in future research.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has some limitations. First, our control variable “sex” did not contribute to the model. However, it should be noted that women were overrepresented in our sample; thus, we may not have had a correct reflection on the sex differences. Previous research has indicated that both men and women participate in body- and slut-shaming, but men’s comments are harsher (Qamar et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2012). Future research with an equal distribution of men and women might be helpful in further analyzing the role of sex in this context. Second, the cross-sectional nature of our design does not allow us to make any conclusions on the direction of the proposed relationships. Moreover, it is possible that other variables besides the four paths that we investigated steer the intention to celebrity appearance-shaming. Previous research, for instance, has indicated that personality traits, such as empathy and moral disengagement, might also impact celebrity bashing (Ouvrein et al., 2018). In addition, media consumption has been related several times with the adoption of beauty ideals and subsequent behaviors (Galdi et al., 2014; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012) and might thus be an interesting variable to take into account in future studies. Third, although the given definition of online celebrity bashing referred to appearance-shaming as a typical example of online celebrity bashing, the definition was formulated in a more general way. As a result, the measurements of the items attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are not focused on appearance-shaming in particular. Future research can fix this issue by providing participants with a definition of celebrity appearance-shaming and asking them to answer the items with this definition in mind instead of a general definition of celebrity bashing. Lastly, the overall intention to participate in celebrity appearance-shaming was low. Almost half of the participants did not report an intention to participate in these types of behaviors in the next few months. This is not unexpected, as previous research has indicated that adolescents’ participation in celebrity bashing is between 11% and 27% (Ouvrein et al., 2018; Pyzalski, 2013). To learn more about the specific group of adolescents who have clear intentions to participate in this behavior, qualitative methods might be applied, as these allow the investigation of small groups in depth. Related to this, though, we need to be aware that intentions are not always a perfect reflection of actual behavior. Due to social desirability and/or unawareness of certain actions, people might, in the end, perform differently than they intended (Sutton, 1998). Although the TPB is considered robust for explaining intentions (Armitage & Connor, 2001), there is no knowledge yet on the association between intentions to celebrity bashing and actual participation in it. Looking into the field of cyberbullying, several longitudinal studies have found that the TPB is a good model for predicting intentions to cyberbully and actual cyberbullying perpetration several months later (e.g., Heirman & Walrave, 2012; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). Future research including both intentions and actual participation in celebrity appearance-shaming is necessary to form a better idea of the association between both for this specific form of online aggression. The latter method also allows researchers to catch more spontaneous cases of appearance-shaming, as research indicates that the practice often occurs subtly and may be unaware (Orr, 2017).

Implications

Despite these limitations, this study makes a theoretical contribution to future research. In response to the common criticism of the TPB and the suggestions of Lee et al. (2006) and Lin et al. (2021) to add cultural background variables, we extended the traditional TPB with sexism. This model had a good fit, and the extra variable significantly helped explain the variance in the outcome variable. Thus, it can be recommended for future research to continue experimenting with adding extra cultural variables to this model. Based on this extra knowledge of the combination of the TBP elements and cultural variables, we are better able to inform intervention initiatives and the people and processes that researchers should focus on. Based on our results, it can be suggested that campaigns should focus on presenting unaccepting attitudes and descriptive norms about celebrity appearance-shaming. These norms may be influenced by putting role models (such as celebrities) who demonstrate netiquette online in the spotlight. As adolescents use these celebrities as their role models, they might take over these unacceptable attitudes and subjective norms, which might lower their intentions to celebrity appearance-shaming. By making these campaigns entertaining and spreading them on social media, marketers can ensure that adolescents encounter and pay attention to them. Moreover, it is advisable to avoid sexist ideas or portraits with a strong focus on the physical and sexual appearance of women in campaigns, as these might

contribute to the maintenance of these ideas and steer celebrity appearance-shaming behavior further online, especially among adolescents, because they are exposed to this kind of content on a regular basis (Ouvrein et al., 2023).

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Author's Contribution

This study was devised and conducted by Gaëlle Ouvrein.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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