



## The influence of peers, parents, and media on Ann's body image in Kelly Barson's *45 Pounds*

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**Abstract.** This thesis discusses body image in Kelly Barson's novel *45 Pounds* through the main character Ann, focusing on her mental image of her body and the factors influencing it. This qualitative research uses in-depth text analysis and a psychological approach, employing body image theories by Calogero & Thompson and factors influencing body image by Van Den Berg & Thompson et al. The analysis reveals that Ann has a negative body image, evident in her perception, attitude, and behavior towards her body. This negative image is influenced by peers, parents, and media. Negative comments, teasing, and behaviors from peers and parents, as well as media portrayals, contribute to Ann's body dissatisfaction. The study concludes that peers, parents, and media significantly impact Ann's negative body image. To build a positive body image, one must accept oneself, focus on health rather than size, and avoid comparisons. Peers, parents, and media should provide positive examples and encouragement regarding body and appearance.

**Keywords:** aspects, body image, factors

### INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a body image in their mind some are negative and some are positive. The beauty standards in a person's environment have a significant influence on their body image. According to Thompson (2004: 8) body image is crucial as it encompasses an individual's perception, thoughts, and feelings about their body. It encompasses how people see themselves physically and believe others perceive them. Shahi et al (2019: 1263) also defined body image as internal thoughts, feelings, evaluations, and behaviors about one's appearance. Body image perception is measured by investigating the difference between actual and ideal body size. Moreover, Slade (1993: 502) defines body image as a non-detailed mental representation of shape, form, and size. In addition, Cash (2004: 2) defines body image as an individual's perception, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to their own body and physical appearance. Sometimes, the way a person thinks about how other people are judging his or her appearance can affect his or her body image. (Fitauli & Marsih 2018: 29). Furthermore, Fallon & Diann in Cash & Pruzinsky (2002: 117) state that body image is a mental image and appearance evaluation and can influence perceptions and attitudes towards behavior.

Body image is an important issue for teenagers because during adolescence, they start to really pay attention to their body appearance. Both teenage boys and teenage girls care a

lot about their appearance, but in general teenage girls pay more attention to their bodies than teenage boys. Research has found that girls are more likely than boys to believe that being thin will make them more liked by others. This belief can lead girls to worry more often about their weight and body image (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002: 110). Generally, negative body image causes extreme dieting which is temporary, so that a person will have eating disorders, depression and emotional stress. As Harrison (2003: 255-264) noted, to achieve an ideal body, women often cause significant harm to themselves by attempting to reduce and reshape their lower bodies through irregular dieting and exercise while trying to enhance or modify their upper bodies through surgery and drugs, including herbal supplements. This prompts the question of why young women are so obsessed on having slim bodies.

One of the reasons young women are so obsessed with slim bodies is because they compare their bodies with other people, whether friends, family or their idols, all of whom have ideal bodies. Levine & Smolak in Cash & Pruzinsky, (2002: 79) state that many teenage girls compare themselves to the slim, glamorous women they see in magazines and on TV. This type of social comparison often exacerbates their negative feelings about their own weight and body shape, particularly if they already struggle with a negative body image.

Body image is a subject depicted in several literary works, one of which is the novel entitled *45 pounds* by Kelly Barson. This novel follows the life of a 16-year-old girl named Ann, who struggles with being overweight. Her peers have slim bodies and even her biological mother also has a slim body. Ann is surrounded by people with slim bodies, which make Ann feel that a beautiful body is a slim body. This novel really describes how body image is influenced by social and cultural influences. This research aims to examine body image in the novel *45 pounds* by Kelly Barson. Based on the previous description, There are two research problems that become the focus of this study, namely: (1) How is body image exposed in Barson's *45 Pounds* (2) What factors influence Ann's body image as reflected in Barson's *45 Pounds*.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Body Image and Its Aspects**

Calogero & Thompson (2010: 153) define body image as a multi-faceted construct that consists of self-perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to one's body. They divided aspects of body image into three, namely perception aspect, attitude aspect, and behavioral aspect.

#### **Perception Aspect**

Refers to how an individual perceives their body as a whole, what a person thinks about the condition of their body. The perception aspect is an individual's accuracy in perceiving or estimating his or her body size. The assessment of good or bad body shape will determine whether he or she feels happy or unhappy with his or her own body shape.

#### **Attitude Aspect**

Relates to an individual's feelings or attitudes towards his or her body, whether positive or negative, feeling satisfied or dissatisfied.

**Behavioral Aspect**

Behavioral aspect refers to how people act towards their bodies based on their experiences with body image. Refers to the actions, behaviors, and practices that individuals engage in as a result of their perceptions and feelings about their bodies.

**Factors That Influence Body Image**

Keery et al., (2004: 238) developed the Tripartite Influence Model, which shows that the three main influences that play an important role in shaping body image and eating disorders are peers, parents and the media. Sociocultural influences like peers, parents, and media can be broken down into several parts. For example, the influence from peers and parents can include things like criticism or teasing, copying dieting behaviors or body image concerns, and focusing on issues related to being overweight. Media influence can involve information about appearance standards and dieting tips, as well as adopting the ideal thin body image promoted by the media. (Keery et al., 2004: 239). Moreover, Van Den Berk & Thompson (2002: 1007), three main factors play a crucial role in how body image and eating disorders develop. These factors greatly influence how a person sees their body and are linked to eating problems and an unhealthy body image.

**Peers**

Peers can directly impact body image through comments, feedback, and behaviors related to appearance.

**Parents**

Parents and family members serve as role models for body image attitudes and behaviors. Children often observe how their family members talk about their own bodies, engage in dieting or exercise behaviors, and express attitudes towards appearance. According to Jones in Cash & Smolak, (2011: 111) state that the way parents interact with their children regarding appearance can significantly impact body image satisfaction. When parents place high importance on looks, emphasize the need to be thin, and pressure their children to lose weight, it increases the likelihood that the children will start dieting and develop negative perceptions about their appearance and body.

**Media**

Media frequently showcases specific beauty ideals through images and messages, often portraying a narrow and unrealistic standard characterized by thinness, muscularity, and flawless appearance. These ideals appear in advertisements, movies, TV shows, magazines, and social media platforms can influence how people perceive their bodies. Exposure to such images can create unrealistic expectations about body appearance.

**METHOD**

This research uses Psychology of Literature, according to Dar (2022: 285) Psychology and fiction are indeed closely intertwined, as both aim to delve into the complexities of

human behavior and thought. Psychology provides authors with insights into how characters might think, act, and react, helping to create more realistic and compelling narratives. By understanding psychological principles, writers can craft characters with depth and authenticity, exploring their motivations, emotions, and actions in a believable manner. This symbiotic relationship allows literature to reflect the nuances of human nature, offering readers a deeper understanding of themselves and others. Because this study deals with psychological issue related to body image, psychological approach is suitable for this research. In addition, the psychological issue discussed in this thesis is the psychology of fictional character named Ann in the novel 45 Pounds.

This research is a descriptive qualitative research. According to Joubish et al. (2011: 2082) qualitative research helps understand how people feel things and why they feel them. Qualitative research aims to develop explanations of social phenomena to help understand our world and why things happen as they do. Qualitative research focuses on social aspects of human life and tries to answer questions about them. This approach highlights the richness of the information collected and provides unique insights. Overall, qualitative research sheds light on the world by making complex phenomena easier to understand. This research is a qualitative research because this research focuses on in-depth analysis of the text, context, and interpretation of meaning in the novel 45 Pounds. To obtain the data, the writer acts as an observer who collects, analyzes, and interprets the data. The steps in collecting the data for this research include reading the novel multiple times to gain a deep understanding, underlining data based on the focus of discussion, and then classifying the data according to the research topic. The data analysis in this study encompasses monologues, narratives, and quotations from the novel. After understanding the content of the novel, the writer applies several steps in analyzing the data, such as describing each piece of data that illustrates specific aspects or factors of body image, then interpreting each piece of data to answer the research questions, and finally drawing conclusions based on the analysis.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Body Image in 45 Pounds**

Body image is exposed through the detailed portrayal of the protagonist, Ann Galardi's, Ann Galardi is a 16-year-old teenager who weighs 185 pounds and is five foot four tall and struggles with her weight and self-perception. She lives in an environment where thinness is the standard of beauty. Her mother is obsessed with a thin body and is very strict about her food. Likewise, Ann's peers always praise thin bodies and make fun of those who have fat bodies. The environment where Ann lives has a great influence on her body image. This includes how Ann sees her body (perception), how she feels about her body (attitude), and how she acts about her body (behavior).

#### **a. Perception Aspect**

Ann's fat body makes her have a negative view of her body, does not feel satisfied with her body, and sees herself as an unattractive girl. Ann tends to categorize her body as fatter than it is. Ann believes that everyone sees her and makes fun of her fat body. Whether someone's comment is positive or negative about her body, Ann still considers it an insult to her body because everyone who says it is someone who has a thin body. Ann's perception of her body can be seen from her habit of being skeptical about other people's praise, mind reading, self-classifying weight, and always comparing her body with other people.

### **a.1 Skeptical of Other People's Praise**

Ann tends to doubt or not believe the praise given to her. This is due to Ann's negative perception and negative experiences in the past. When Ann and her mother go to a clothing store to buy a swimsuit and she shows her mother a size 17 bikini, her mother says that Ann's size is not 17. Her mother thinks that it is too big for Ann, but Ann does not believe her mother's words and feels that size 17 is suitable for her body size. This can be seen from the quotation below:

What about this?!

Antoinette! Come on. She grabs the tag. You're not a seventeen! That thing is huge! Don't they have a smaller one? A smaller size won't fit me properly. Are you not seeing that, Mom? (Barson, 2013: 8).

The quotation above shows that Ann views and judges her body as fat. She feels that a size below 17 will not fit her fat body. Ann does not believe what her mother says because she already has a negative perception of her body moreover it is her mother who says it, who is very obsessed with her appearance and body size.

### **a.2 Mind Reading**

Ann tends to try to read and interpret other people's reactions based on personal assumptions without paying attention to clear information or direct communication. For example, Ann always feels that other people's gazes and reactions mock her fatness, even though no comments were uttered. Just a glance alone offends Ann. Ann's perception of her body can be seen when she is at the clothing store with her mother, and she notices people looking away. Ann feels that people pity her and her mother, either because people pity Ann for not being able to wear cute swimsuits or because they pity her mother for having to take care of her chubby daughter. This can be seen in the quotation below:

I catch people looking away. Like they feel sorry for us—either because I can't fit into a cute swimsuit or because Mom has to deal with a fat daughter. (Barson, 2013: 8).

The quotation above shows that Ann has a very negative view of her body. Even though people do not say anything, just by the way they look at her, Ann feels offended because she believes their gazes are mocking her overweight body. She even struggles to find a bigger size bikini that she thinks to fit her body. This shows that Ann thinks her body is unattractive, and she is not satisfied with her appearance. Thus, she always feels embarrassed in crowded places.

### **a.3 Self Classification Weight**

Ann measures her body as fat for many reasons. First, her weight does not match the existing weight chart. Secondly, she often finds that the size of the clothes she wants is not fit for her body. Thirdly, she always thinks that her body has folds of fat. For example, when Ann is applying for a job and doing interview, she already feels that she will not be able to get the job because of her body condition, which she perceives as large like a cow. This can be seen from the quotation below:

Oh God. This hadn't occurred to me. Of course. It makes sense—the problem is that I can't do it. Yet. I do not want to say this out loud and admit that I am a cow. It's obvious. She's not blind. (Barson, 2013: 75).

The quotation above illustrates that Ann measures her body as fat and large like a cow, even though in reality, her body does not look like a cow at all. Ann feels like she looks

like a cow because she has already perceived her body as very fat and unattractive. She perceives her body to be bigger and uglier than it actually is.

### **b. Attitude Aspect**

Ann has negative feelings about her body, and she is not satisfied with it so that she pays much attention to her appearance. Ann is very critical of her appearance and easily feels anxious or embarrassed about her appearance, especially in front of other people. Ann's attitude towards her body can be seen from the symptoms she experiences, such as always being self-conscious, body-conscious, and tend to fantasize about being thin.

#### **b.1 Being Self-conscious**

Self-consciousness is an individual's awareness of him or herself, including awareness of individual's physical appearance. The term refers to the feeling when someone feels uncomfortable or worried about what others think of her or him. In Ann's case, she feels dissatisfied with her weight, which does not match the ideal weight standard. She feels uncomfortable and insecure regarding her appearance, especially in the context of her weight and physical appearance. She also feels embarrassed and awkward about expressing her desire to go on a diet again because she is worried about how her mother will react if she says she will start dieting again. This shows the feelings of low self-esteem and dissatisfaction that Ann experiences with her own body.

Ann's negative feelings about her body are evident when she avoids being photographed. She feels uneasy because she worries that she will appear heavier in the pictures. This discomfort reflects her dissatisfaction with her body image, where she perceives herself in a negative light and prefers not to capture images that might reinforce those feelings. Her reluctance to be photographed suggests a deeper insecurity about her appearance and how others might perceive her. This can be seen in the quotation:

I hate getting my picture taken. They always make me look even fatter than I am (Barson, 2013: 65).

The quotation expresses Ann's dissatisfaction and discomfort with her body in the photo. Ann realizes that her body is unattractive and thinks that she looks fatter in photos, that is why Ann dislikes being photographed. This reflects Ann's high self-consciousness about her physical appearance and excessive concern about how she looks in pictures.

#### **b.2 Body-consciousness (awareness of the body)**

Body-consciousness can be interpreted as an individual's awareness of her or his body or physical needs. Ann has this awareness of her body condition, which is why she tends to pay attention to her physical appearance and wants to make changes related to her physical appearance. She does not want to wear clothes that show off her fatness because she thinks that other people would be disgusted by her fat body. She is not comfortable with her large body size, and she is even embarrassed to tell other people her clothing size. This can be seen from the following situation: Ann is very selective about clothes, especially revealing ones like bikinis. She does not want to wear tight or small clothes because she is embarrassed to show her body fat. This can be seen from the quotation below:

What about this one? Mom holds up a tiny orange polka dot bikini. Skimpy. They are all skimpy. I stare at her. Is she crazy? That is not going to fit me. And even if Keehn's did have my size, it would be a crime against humanity to show that much flab in public. (Barson, 2013: 3).

The quotation above shows that Ann has negative feelings about her fat body. She feels that if she wears tight clothes and shows her fat, it will bother others' sight. She pays much attention to her fat body and is very picky about clothes, especially bikinis. This shows that Ann wants to improve her appearance by not wearing tight and small clothes because she thinks that tight clothes will make her appearance look worse.

### **b.3 Tend to Fantasize About Being Thin**

Ann's negative perception makes her feels unhappy with her body, she often daydreams about losing weight and becoming slim. This desire serves as her motivation to try various weight loss programs. She hopes these programs will help her achieve the slim figure she envisions. This persistent dissatisfaction with her body prompts Ann to actively pursue ways to change her appearance, believing that shedding weight will lead to greater satisfaction and confidence.

Ann always judges herself as crap because of her fat body. As she starts a new weight loss program, Ann already fantasizes about her body becoming slim, driven by her dissatisfaction with her body. This can be seen from the following quotation:

Maybe I'm tired of feeling like crap and ready to do something about it for real this time. Maybe I'm grasping at straws. Who knows, but still I can't help fantasizing about this program. (Barson, 2013: 20).

The quotation shows that Ann often fantasizes about being thin. When Ann plans to join a weight loss program, she feels very enthusiastic because she believes that soon she will achieve her dream slim body. This indicates that Ann strongly dislikes her current body condition (being overweight).

### **c. Behavioral Aspect**

Ann's perception and attitude towards her body makes her limit her food and go on a diet program. Ann pays a lot of attention to her weight, she realizes she's overweight and feels uncomfortable with it that make her want to lose weight. Ann often thinks about her weight and tries different diet programs. She tries hard to control her eating habits to reduce her weight. This can be seen from the quotation below:

I'm still kind of shaky and wonder if I should eat something. My usual order of a giant pretzel with nacho cheese is not on the S2S plan. (Barson, 2013: 76)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Ann worries about what she will eat. She restricts her eating patterns and she hesitates to eat what is not recommended in her diet program, the S2S plan. She's afraid that if she breaks her diet program, her weight will not decrease or might even increase.

## **2. The Factors that Influence Ann's Body Image**

Ann believes that a beautiful body is a slim body, a body that can fit into any clothes without worrying about size. However, the fact is that Ann has a fat body and has difficulty finding clothes that are suitable for her body size. This makes her feel that she is not beautiful and attractive. Ann develops a negative body image and tends to insult her body and become lack self-confidence. Ann's beauty standards are influenced by her environments, such as peers, parents and the media.

### **a. Peers**

Ann's body image is heavily influenced by the criticism and teasing of her peers regarding her appearance. Ann's peers tend to make negative comments and tease Ann about her

weight or appearance by making sarcastic remarks about her body. These affect how Ann sees herself. Ann's peers also show positive behavior towards thin bodies, they treat people differently based on appearance, with attractive individuals being treated well and acknowledged, and vice versa.

The influence of peers is not only from the comments and teasing they direct at Ann but also from their behavior that discriminates based on appearance. There are two ways in which peers factor influence Ann's body image, namely through comments and teasing and their behavior towards thin bodies.

### **a.1 Comments and Teasing**

Ann often receives hurtful comments and teasing from her peers because of her fat body. Ann's peers often talk about and insult her body either directly in front of her or behind her back. Like in the event when Ann meets her friend Naomi and Amber while shopping for clothes, Naomi asks Amber to help her finding clothes that will not make her thighs look big. Naomi purposely says this in front of Ann to ensure she hears it. This can be seen from the quote below:

Come in with me, Amber.” Naomi steps into the stall but maintains eye contact with me. “Help me find something that doesn’t make my thighs look huge.” I pick up a woolly chartreuse sweater from the floor and pretend I didn’t hear the thigh comment. I know it’s aimed at me. Naomi and her brother Nate called me Thunder Thighs when we were younger. I went home crying more than once because of it. (Barson, 2013: 6)

The quotation above shows that negative comments and teasing about Ann's fat body make Ann feel offended, but she tries not to respond because she realizes that what Naomi says is true. That is why she can not retaliate. Ann can only cry when her friends tease and mock her fat body. This makes Ann have a negative perception of her body.

### **a.2 Behavior Towards Thin Bodies**

Ann's peers have slim bodies because they take good care of their bodies, so they still look beautiful when dressed and follow existing beauty standards. Ann's peers show positive behavior towards their slim bodies, which makes Ann feel that her fat body will not allow her to be confident like them. This also makes Ann feel isolated when they gather together. Ann feels that she cannot socialize with them because her body is very different from her peers' bodies.

Moreover, the appearance standard in Ann's school emphasizes looks and dressing style. Those who have attractive appearances are easily accepted and valued by other friends. This behavior influences a person's social status and acceptance in the group, this creates pressure for Ann to conform to those standards. This can be seen from the quotation below:

If I worked at Snapz!, though, I would be instantly cool. And my social life would go from nonexistent to persistent. At school, the girls who wear their clothes stand out, and the lucky few who have jobs there are invited to every party. Everyone seems to want to hang out with them. (Barson, 2013: 9)

The quotation above shows that the behavior of Ann's peers, who judge people based on appearance and status, creates pressure for Ann to conform to those standards, even though she feels unable to because of her weight. This reflects the social pressure Ann feels to meet the appearance standards set by her friends.



## **b. Parents**

Parents also play a significant role in influencing Ann's perception of her body. Ann sees that her mother often talks negatively about being overweight, and Ann's mother is very strict about her eating habits because she is afraid of gaining weight. Ann notices all of this and is influenced by her mother's words and actions. Ann often compares her body to her mother's slim body, so Ann tries to mimic her mother's behavior and strives to meet the standards set by her mother. Her mother influences Ann's body image in two ways, namely, the comments and teasing she makes about herself or Ann's body condition and her behavior and habits towards her body.

### **b.1 Comments and Teasing**

Parents' comments and teasing about their bodies or other people's bodies can influence how children perceive their bodies. In Ann's case, she and her mother have different body sizes, fat and thin. Her mother often says that she is fat even though her body is beautiful and slim. What her mother has about her body condition made Ann feel that her body, which was bigger than her mother's body, is not beautiful. In Ann's opinion, her mother's body is already slim, but she still often complains about her body size.

Ann often receives hurtful comments directly from her mother, such as when Ann is eating and her mother sees her, her mother, in an annoyed tone, tells Ann to stop eating. These comments shock and hurt Ann. This can be seen in the following quotation:

Then Mom sees me. "God, Antoinette! Do something besides eat, will you?" Boom! Shrapnel to the face. (Barson, 2013: 67).

The quotation above shows that Ann's mother influences her body image by making hurtful comments about Ann's diet. These negative comments have a big impact on how Ann sees and feels about her body and make her negative body image worsen.

### **b.2 Dieting Behaviour**

Parents' dieting or exercise behaviour towards their bodies also greatly influence how children perceive their bodies. Like Ann's condition, she often sees her mother's Dieting and exercise behavior in keeping her body slim, such as avoiding unhealthy food and not eating too much. Her mother also used to control and regulate what Ann would eat and do to lose weight. This does not only affect how Ann sees her body but also affect Ann's relationship with food.

Ann's mother plays a significant role in regulating Ann's eating habits and physical activities. Her mother acts as Ann's personal chef, which means she has control over the types of food Ann consumes. Although her mother's goal is to teach Ann how to control portion sizes, Ann feels restricted and often sneaks in junk food. Her mother also serves as Ann's personal trainer, aiming to teach the importance of fitness and create a sense of endorphin euphoria (boosting mood). However, Ann feels burdened and ends up frequently lying and pretending to be injured to avoid forced physical activities. This can be seen from the following quotation:

Mom wasn't just a realtor but also my personal chef and trainer—or "food and fitness Nazi," as my friend Cassie called her. Her plan to teach me portion control and endorphin euphoria wound up teaching me how to sneak junk food and fake injury. (Barson, 2013: 5)

The quotation above shows that Ann's mother plays an important role in influencing Ann's eating habits and physical activity. As a mother, she might see it as her way of caring for Ann. Ann's mother seems to want to teach Ann about the importance of controlling

portion sizes and staying fit. However, what her mother has done does not match Ann's wishes and needs, as mentioned by her friend who refers to Ann's mother as a "food and fitness Nazi." This reflects how parents' behavior regarding eating habits and fitness affects Ann's perception and attitude toward her body and food.

### **c. Media**

Ann's perception of her body is also influenced by media exposure, such as advertisements, movies, TV shows, and social media. Ann sees images and messages portraying the ideal of perfect and unrealistic beauty through television, like thin bodies. There are also advertisements offering diet pills and diet programs showing comparisons of someone's body, initially fat, becoming thin. This creates unrealistic expectations and desires about her body appearance and increases Ann's dissatisfaction with her body. Ann compares her body to the bodies of other people she sees in the media, and she often fantasizes about being successful at losing weight and looking like them. Like in this quotation:

I've seen a thousand fitness and weight loss infomercials, but this one hits home. Maybe it's because Natalie S. is so much like me. (Barson, 2013: 20).

The quotation above shows that advertisements that show beauty standards can be a benchmark for Ann to judge her body. Natalie S, who is described as more beautiful after losing weight, makes Ann feel that she will also be beautiful if she can lose weight. These representations make Ann feel that following the advertised diet program can make her reach her ideal body weight.

## **CONCLUSION**

After finding and analyzing the body image of the main character and the factors influencing it in the novel *45 Pounds* by Kelly Barson, the writer concludes that the character Ann has a negative body image, evidenced by her skepticism towards compliments, tendency to read and interpret others' thoughts based on personal assumptions, frequent classification of her body as very fat, self-consciousness, body consciousness, fantasies about being thin, and behaviors such as dieting and food restriction. The influence of peers, parents, and media shapes Ann's negative body image. Her peers' negative comments and teasing about her appearance, along with her mother's negative talk about weight and strict eating habits, impact her perception. Media exposure to unrealistic beauty standards and diet advertisements further contributes to her dissatisfaction. To build a positive body image, individuals need to develop self-confidence by accepting their bodies, focusing on health rather than size, avoiding comparisons to unrealistic media standards, and fostering a positive environment. Peers and parents should offer positive perceptions and attitudes toward body appearance, and the media should avoid glorifying thin bodies and emphasize healthy body weight positively.

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