



# Body Shaming Utterances in Film Series of Mother Elephant: Theo van Leeuwen's Multimodal Study

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## Abstract

This research aims to describe the form of body shaming utterances and the impact of body shaming behavior in the Mother Elephant film series based on Multimodal theory. This research uses a qualitative descriptive research method. Data collection techniques in this research were carried out using listening and documentation techniques. The results of this research prove that there are forms of speech that contain the meaning of body shaming directly and indirectly which are expressed in several points which include character descriptions (frame position, facial expressions, dialogue, costumes, hair and make-up), music (soundtrack) or sound effects, scene descriptions (situation and conflict), representation of the meaning of analysis, the meaning of body shaming utterances, and the role of the combination of visual and verbal modes. On the other hand, it was found that the impact experienced by the victim due to body shaming behavior on him was described in several points which included character descriptions (frame position, facial expressions, dialogue, costumes, hair and make-up), music (soundtrack) or sound effects, scene descriptions, and meaning representations so that the impact of body shaming behavior which includes psychological and emotional impacts.

**Keywords:** *Film series, multimodal, body shaming, utterances, impact.*

## Introduction

The film has become one of the most popular communication media among the public because it serves as a means to convey phenomena or true stories that occur in society. A film is a tool for delivering various messages to the general public through the medium of storytelling, and it can also be interpreted as an artistic expression medium for artists and filmmakers to express their ideas and story concepts (Asri, 2020). In today's film industry, there are already many films in the form of series, which of course have some differences from regular films.

A film series is a type of film created with a longer storyline, typically presented in episodes, with each episode being a continuation of the previous one. Film series not only explore themes like romance, friendship, and family, but they also often address issues like body shaming, which has become increasingly common in Indonesia (Widya et al., 2022). One example of a film series that tackles the theme of body shaming is *Mother Elephant* directed by Muhadkly Acho, which is an adaptation of a novel by Irgita Sembiring and was first released on March 23, 2023.

The series *Mother Elephant* is a comedy genre consisting of 8 episodes, with each episode having a duration of about 30-40 minutes. In brief, the *Mother Elephant* series tells the life journey of a woman named Ira, who continuously receives negative comments about her appearance and faces pressure to change her looks, as it is believed that appearance is crucial for her to find a partner. The issue of body shaming is considered highly significant to study in the *Mother Elephant* series because the entire storyline originates from the physical condition of the main character, who becomes a victim of body shaming due to her body shape. Therefore, the researcher is interested in analyzing the elements of body shaming in the *Mother Elephant* series using Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal theory.

Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal theory, as presented in his book *Reading Images* (1996), focuses on analyzing meaning based on the relationship between text and images. Theo van Leeuwen analyzes data in the form of multimodal texts that simultaneously use verbal and visual semiotic resources. Additionally, Theo van Leeuwen introduces concepts such as "mode" and "design," which aid in analyzing how meaning is produced through the interaction of various modes of communication.

Therefore, the researcher chose Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal theory to reveal hidden messages or meanings in each scene of the *Mother Elephant* series related to body shaming. Several studies are relevant to this research, including those conducted by Nurul Latifah Pujiningrum and Vira Widhia (2022) and Ida Nuraeni et al. (2022), which also use multimodal theory as an analytical tool. The difference lies in the researcher's effort to choose a different film object to uncover forms of speech containing body shaming meanings and the impact of body shaming behavior depicted in the *Mother Elephant* series, using Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal theory as the main focus of the study.

Multimodality is a term commonly used to refer to the way people communicate using different modes simultaneously (Van Leeuwen, 2005). "Multimodal" consists of two words: "multi," meaning many or more than one, and "modal," derived from "mode," meaning method. The term multimodal, in relation to discourse analysis, describes how people construct, exchange, and interpret discourse, or in other words, how they engage in communication (Van Leeuwen, 2005).

Multimodality began to enter linguistics through the significant work of Theo van Leeuwen, specifically *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996) and *Multimodal Discourse*. In *Reading Images*, Theo van Leeuwen discusses the importance of visual resources in communication practices and explains how meaning can be conveyed through visual semiotic resources such as images and visuals in general (Van Leeuwen, 2015).

Specifically, Theo van Leeuwen defines modes as elements such as text, layout, facial expressions, music (soundtrack) or sound effects, and body movements (gestures) as common modes used in communication practices, often supported by hairstyles, costumes, and makeup (Van Leeuwen, 2001). In his book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996), Theo van Leeuwen provides examples of visual images with specific meanings, which can be understood by examining the available modes and explaining what is happening in the images.

## Method

The research method used is qualitative research, a method that examines how to approach issues phenomenologically, meaning how to collect data in the form of words (spoken and written), statements, gestures, experiences, and observed behaviors. This research is qualitative in nature, meaning the researcher attempts to describe or explain in depth through data collection (Hikmat, 2014). The researcher will analyze and describe the data obtained from the *Mother Elephant* series using Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal theory, focusing on the forms of body shaming speech and the impact of body shaming behavior.

Data collection involves listening and documentation techniques, while data analysis involves data identification, organization or grouping, data sorting, thematization, and drawing conclusions. Qualitative descriptive research refers to information that can be categorized but cannot be quantified.

## Results

### **Forms of Speech Containing Body Shaming Meanings in the *Mother Elephant* Series Related to the Visual Context Combined with Verbal Text Based on Theo van Leeuwen's Multimodal Analysis**

The *Mother Elephant* series by Muhadkly Acho depicts the story of a Batak girl who is often underestimated solely because of her physical appearance, making her a frequent victim of body shaming. She is constantly judged by those around her, who view her differently from other women due to her larger body size. The forms of body shaming speech resulting from the main female character's physical condition can be seen through the visual mode combined with verbal text in the series, based on Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal analysis, which focuses on *Reading Images* to describe character details (such as framing, facial expressions, dialogue, costumes, hairstyles, and makeup), scene descriptions, message delivery, and the meaning of body

shaming speech. The forms of body shaming speech in the *Mother Elephant* series by Muhadkly Acho include both direct and indirect body shaming.

**a. Direct body shaming speech**

Data 1: At minute 04:45 (episode 1)



**1) Character Description: Mama Ira**

- a) Framing Position:** Mama Ira is positioned in the center of the frame, sitting on the left, emphasizing her role as the focal point of the scene.
- b) Facial Expression:** Her expression is one of annoyance and sarcasm, with her gaze directed at Ira's stomach, indicating dissatisfaction and criticism.
- c) Dialogue:** *"Look at your stomach. It's like an elephant's stomach."*
- d) Costume, Hairstyle, Makeup:** Wearing a cream-colored short-sleeved shirt with shoulder-length hair left loose. Her hair is black with some white strands, and her face is bare without makeup, indicating a simple but assertive character.

**2) Character Description: Ira**

- a) Framing Position:** Positioned in the center of the frame, sitting on the right, emphasizing her role as the focal point of the scene.
- b) Facial Expression:** A sulking expression, holding back frustration and embarrassment, with her gaze focused solely on picking up the rice in front of her, indicating her indifference to her mother's words.
- c) Dialogue:** Ira remains silent, not uttering any dialogue.
- d) Costume, Hairstyle, Makeup:** Wearing a cream-colored short-sleeved shirt with blue writing on the front, and long black hair left loose in the front. Her face is very plain without makeup, indicating a simple character.

**3) Music (soundtrack) or sound effects:**

The sound effects in the scene come from the cup placed by Mama Ira and the sound of the rice scoop used by Ira. Mama Ira places a cup of water on the table when she sees Ira serving herself an excessive amount of rice. Additionally, the sound of the rice scoop made by Ira when taking too much rice signifies her frustration.

**4) Scene Description:**

- a) Situation:** Mama Ira and Ira are having dinner together at the dining table to celebrate Ira's 30th birthday.
- b) Action:** Mama Ira, who is about to pour water into a glass, suddenly becomes annoyed seeing Ira serve herself rice because she refuses to heed Mama Ira's advice to control her appetite, creating a tense atmosphere in their conversation.

**5) Conveying Meaning:**

Mama Ira, as the perpetrator of body shaming, is evident from the negative comments she gives about Ira's body shape. Ira, in turn, becomes the victim of body shaming as a result of these negative comments.

**6) Analysis of Speech Containing Body Shaming Meanings:****a) Dialogue:**

*"Look at your stomach. It's like an elephant's stomach."*

The meaning of this body shaming speech indicates that Ira needs to be aware of her growing stomach, which resembles an elephant's belly due to her excessive appetite and disregard for the impact on her body condition later. This speech is a direct form of body shaming because Mama Ira directly insults and criticizes Ira's body shape and behavior, which is seen as not aligning with societal norms about ideal female appearance.

**b) Visual:**

Mama Ira is positioned in the center of the frame, sitting on the left, showing an expression of annoyance and sarcasm, which emphasizes her criticism of Ira. Her gaze directed at Ira's stomach reinforces the body shaming comment. Ira, positioned in the center of the frame on the right, shows a sulking expression, holding back frustration and embarrassment, highlighting her role as the victim of body shaming. Her focused gaze on the rice signifies her indifference to the body shaming comments directed at her.

## 7) Combination of Visual and Verbal in Meaning:

- a) **Visual:** The central position in the frame, facial expression, and eye movement of Mama Ira reinforce the verbal message being conveyed, while Ira's central position in the frame, facial expression, and eye movement emphasize her role as the recipient of the verbal message.
- b) **Verbal:** Mama Ira's words explicitly convey criticism that leads to body shaming.
- c) **Multimodal Analysis:** In Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal theory, the combination of visual and verbal elements creates a strong and clear message about body shaming, highlighting the role of both modes in communicating the meaning contained within the media through *Reading Images*.

### b. Indirect body shaming speech

Data 2: At minute 19:37 (Episode 2)



#### 1) Character Description: Mama Ira

- a) **Framing Position:** Mama Ira is positioned in the center of the frame, standing, which emphasizes her role as a key focus in the scene.
- b) **Facial Expression:** Although her facial expression is not visible in the frame, her voice sounds angry, and her gaze seems directed toward Ira, indicating frustration and criticism.
- c) **Dialogue:** "The chair will collapse. Get down."
- d) **Costume, Hairstyle, Makeup:** Wearing a long-sleeved, light green dress with a black bamboo motif, the dress is ankle-length. Her shoulder-length hair is black with some white strands and is left loose. Her face is bare without makeup, indicating a simple yet assertive character.

## 2) Character Description: Ira

- a) **Framing Position:** Positioned in the center of the frame, sitting, emphasizing her role as the focal point of the scene.
- b) **Facial Expression:** An expression of panic and fear, with her gaze directed at Mama Ira, showing her fear and indifference to her mother's words.
- c) **Dialogue:** Ira only screams in fear without uttering any dialogue.
- d) **Costume, Hairstyle, Makeup:** Wearing a plain cream-colored cuff as an inner layer and a colorful long-sleeved cardigan as an outer layer. Her long black hair is left loose in the front. Her face is very plain without makeup, indicating a simple character.

## 3) Music (soundtrack) or sound effects:

The sound effect in the scene comes from the noise of the chair suddenly being jumped on by Ira when she is frightened by a mouse wandering inside her house.

## 4) Scene Description:

- a) **Situation:** Ira is terrified upon realizing that Mama Ira is searching for a mouse wandering inside the house.
- b) **Action:** Mama Ira is angry and frustrated with Ira, who continues to scream in fear while avoiding the wandering mouse, creating a tense atmosphere in their interaction.

## 5) Conveying Meaning:

Mama Ira, as the perpetrator of body shaming, is evident from the negative comments she makes about Ira's body shape. Consequently, Ira becomes the victim of body shaming due to these negative comments.

## 6) Analysis of Speech Containing Body Shaming Meanings:

### a) Dialogue:

*"The chair will collapse. Get down!"*

This body shaming remark implies that Ira's large weight will cause the chair to collapse when she sits on it because it cannot support her weight. This is an example of indirect body shaming, as Mama Ira's comment indirectly criticizes Ira's body shape.

**b) Visual:**

Mama Ira is positioned in the center of the frame, standing on the right. Though her facial expression is not visible, her voice sounds angry, emphasizing her criticism of Ira. Her gaze directed at Ira reinforces the body shaming comment. Ira, seated on the left and positioned in the center of the frame, shows a panicked and frightened expression, with her gaze reflecting her fear and indifference to the body shaming remark.

**7) Combination of Visual and Verbal in Meaning:**

**a) Visual:** Positioned in the center of the frame, Mama Ira's facial expression, though not visible, is discernible through her voice, and her eye movement reinforces the verbal message. Meanwhile, Ira's central position in the frame, along with her facial expression and eye movement, emphasizes her role as the recipient of the verbal message.

**b) Verbal:** Mama Ira's words implicitly convey criticism that leads to body shaming.

**c) Multimodal Analysis:** According to Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal theory, the combination of visual and verbal elements creates a strong and clear message about body shaming, highlighting the role of both modes in communicating the meaning contained within the media through *Reading Images*.

**Impact of Body Shaming Behavior in the *Mother Elephant* Film Series Based on Theo van Leeuwen's Multimodal Analysis**

The impact of body shaming behavior proves to have a negative effect on the victims of such behavior. This is experienced by the main female character, Ira, in the *Mother Elephant* film series by Muhadkly Acho. The constant body shaming she endures significantly disrupts her psychological and emotional well-being due to the ongoing pressure and criticism related to her body shape, which is considered not to meet the standards of ideal female beauty.

**Data 3: At minute 21:32 (Episode 2)**





## 1. Character Description: Ira

- a. **Framing Position:** Ira is centered in the frame while sitting, emphasizing her role as the focal point in the scene.
  - b. **Facial Expression:** A sad, embarrassed, and disappointed expression, with her eyes looking down, indicates her feelings of rejection after receiving negative treatment.
  - c. **Dialogue:** Ira remains silent without saying anything.
  - d. **Costume, Hairstyle, Makeup:** She is wearing a plain, short-sleeved cream-colored shirt, and her long black hair is left down in front. Her face is bare without makeup, signifying a simple character.
2. **Music (soundtrack) or sound effects:** The soundtrack in the scene is mellow music that complements the sadness Ira is feeling.
  3. **Scene Description:** Ira reflects on her mother's words in her room, thinking about being considered a daughter with a body shape resembling an elephant.
  4. **Conveying Meaning:** Ira as a victim of body shaming behavior.
  5. **The impact of body shaming behavior:** The frequent body shaming behavior Ira experiences regarding her body shape has a detrimental impact on her psychological state, as she is constantly belittled and insulted. Ira feels sad, embarrassed, and disappointed by Mama Ira's remarks, which consistently compare her to an elephant. These insults only add to Ira's mental burden and further erode her self-confidence.
    - a. **Psychological Impact:**  
Feelings of low self-esteem and insecurity due to negative comments about her body appearance.
    - b. **Emotional Impact:**  
Ira becomes unable to respond or defend herself verbally. Her silence indicates her sadness and helplessness in the face of the body shaming behavior directed at her, leading her to feel increasingly pressured.
  6. **Multimodal Analysis:** In Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal theory, the visual mode creates a strong and explicit message about the impact experienced by the character as a victim of body shaming. Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal approach emphasizes the visual mode in communicating the effects endured by the character through media via *Reading Images*. According to Theo van Leeuwen, the visual mode includes elements such as frame position, facial expressions, costumes, hairstyles, and makeup, while the verbal mode addresses the psychological and emotional impact of body shaming experienced by Ira, the main female character in the film.

## Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the film series *Mother Elephant* features both direct and indirect forms of body shaming resulting from physical conditions often deemed nonconforming to social standards, particularly within the family environment. Direct body shaming is depicted through explicit insults, ridicule, and belittlement of the female protagonist Ira's body parts, while indirect body shaming is shown through veiled criticism that does not explicitly reference Ira's body.

The continuous experience of body shaming impacts her psychological and emotional health. Psychologically, she feels increasingly inferior and insecure due to the insults and pressure, leading to heightened stress. Emotionally, she experiences sadness, frustration, embarrassment, and disappointment, feeling unable to respond or defend herself verbally against the ongoing pressures.

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