

Islamic-Informed Self-Compassion as a Protective Mechanism against Negative Body Image: A Phenomenological Study of Female Adolescents in Islamic Schools

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to: (1) analyze the role of self-compassion in dealing with negative body image and the factors influencing it among female adolescents; (2) explore the contribution of moral education to the development of self-compassionate attitudes; and (3) evaluate the impact of self-compassion on the psychological and social well-being of female adolescents in Islamic schools. This research addresses the limitations of previous studies, which predominantly employed quantitative approaches and have not contextually addressed spiritual values.

Design/methods/approach – This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Four female adolescents from Muhammadiyah Junior High Schools 7 and 8 in Surakarta were purposively selected based on their experiences with negative body image. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document studies, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's technique. Data validity was enhanced through triangulation of methods, sources, and theories.

Findings – The study found that self-compassion functions as a protective mechanism that helps female adolescents manage social pressures related to the body. The three main dimensions of Neff's framework—self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness—were identified in the participants' narratives. Moral education that internalizes Islamic values such as gratitude (*syukur*), contentment (*qanaah*), and sincerity (*ikhlas*) contributed to self-acceptance and psychological resilience. Self-compassion also had a positive impact on increasing self-confidence, emotional calmness, and healthy social relationships.

Research implications – The findings recommend a reformulation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum to be more responsive to adolescents' psychosocial issues, as well as the development of spiritual mentoring programs and Islamic media literacy to promote positive body image and emotional well-being among students.

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is a complex and critical developmental phase, characterized by intense biological, psychological, and social changes. During this stage, individuals undergo a process of identity exploration, self-discovery, and a heightened need for social acceptance (Agustiningsih, 2019). One significant aspect of adolescent identity, particularly among female adolescents, is body image—defined as one's perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding their physical form and appearance. Body image becomes increasingly salient during adolescence due to the physical changes that often lead to dissatisfaction with one's body, especially when self-perception does not align with idealized standards constructed by media and popular culture (Puspasari, 2019).



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Body dissatisfaction, or negative body image, has been shown to correlate with psychological disturbances such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and low self-esteem (Dumar et al., 2024). In the current digital era, the pressure to attain an ideal body standard is further amplified through social media, where female adolescents are vulnerable to social comparison and unrealistic expectations (Li et al., 2018). Empirical evidence indicates a bidirectional relationship between problematic social media use and psychopathological variables, including negative body image (Dumar et al., 2024). Many female adolescents are unaware of the long-term mental health consequences stemming from negative body perceptions (Dumar et al., 2024).

In response to such pressures, the concept of self-compassion emerges as a relevant and potentially effective psychological strategy. Self-compassion comprises three core dimensions: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2011). Individuals with self-compassion tend to accept themselves with gentleness, recognize that imperfection is a shared human experience, and are capable of managing emotions consciously without excessive self-judgment. Self-compassion contributes to fostering self-acceptance and building resilience against appearance-related social pressures, including those imposed by media (Neff, 2011).

Previous studies have demonstrated positive associations between self-compassion, body satisfaction, and emotional well-being (Annisa et al., 2023; Masyi'ta, 2023). For instance, a moderate correlation between body image and self-confidence among female adolescents was found in a quantitative study (Annisa et al., 2023). However, such studies remain limited to quantitative approaches and have yet to explore in depth the subjective experiences of female adolescents. Another study examined the influence of self-compassion and social support on adolescents' body image, though the focus was primarily on the impact of social media (Masyi'ta, 2023). Thus, there is a need to explore other psychosocial dimensions, including the educational environment and religious values.

To date, most studies investigating body image and self-compassion have employed quantitative approaches, while qualitative methods remain underutilized in capturing the psychological and social dynamics experienced by female adolescents. This creates a methodological gap and empirical gap (Miles, 2017), particularly within the context of education grounded in Islamic values, which holds significant potential for shaping self-compassion through moral education. The Islamic perspective on body image emphasizes purity, dignity, and the balance between physical and spiritual aspects (S. R. Sari et al., 2024). Moral education in Islamic schools, which instills values such as gratitude (*syukur*), patience (*sabar*), contentment (*qanaah*), and sincerity (*ikhlas*), can play a vital role in fostering healthy self-perception and cultivating holistic self-acceptance (Rusnawati & Chanifudin, 2025; F. I. Sari & Ansyah, 2022).

Preliminary observations conducted by the researchers at Muhammadiyah Junior High Schools 7 and 8 in Surakarta revealed that the majority of female students experienced negative body image in the form of persistent feelings of insecurity. The impacts included decreased self-confidence, trauma, and even reduced motivation to attend school. These findings indicate that negative body image is not merely a psychological issue, but one that also affects educational participation and well-being. In this context, the role of self-compassion becomes significant, particularly when developed through moral values in Islamic education, which emphasizes not only cognitive achievement but also character development and faith. Individuals who internalize spiritual values within self-compassion are more capable of accepting their limitations, maintaining moral conduct, and aligning their behavior with religious guidance.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address several critical questions that remain underexplored in the existing literature. First, how can self-compassion assist female adolescents in constructively coping with negative body image? Second, to what extent does moral education in Islamic schools contribute

to the development of self-compassion? Third, what is the impact of self-compassion on the psychological and social well-being of female adolescents within the context of Islamic schools?

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- a. To analyze the role of self-compassion in addressing negative body image and the influencing factors among female adolescents at Muhammadiyah Junior High Schools 7 and 8 in Surakarta;
- b. To explore the contribution of moral education to the development of self-compassion among female adolescents in the aforementioned schools;
- c. To evaluate the impact of self-compassion on the psychological and social well-being of female adolescents experiencing negative body image.

This research carries both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it enriches the understanding of the integration between self-compassion and Islamic values in fostering psychological resilience among adolescents. Practically, the findings of this study may serve as a foundation for Islamic educational institutions to design value-based interventions aimed at addressing issues of negative body image and facilitating the development of more holistic and balanced character formation among female adolescents.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. This design was selected as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences of female adolescents in coping with negative body image and developing self-compassion through moral education in Islamic schools (Creswell, 2014; Juita et al., 2025). The phenomenological approach focuses on interpreting individuals' lived experiences, particularly in the context of social pressures related to body image and the internalization of spiritual values (Juita et al., 2025).

2.2. Participants and Data Sources

The primary participants in this study comprised four female adolescents from Muhammadiyah Junior High Schools 7 and 8 in Surakarta, selected purposively. The inclusion criteria were: (1) having experienced or currently experiencing negative body image based on self-report or observations by the school counselor/homeroom teacher, (2) possessing an understanding of social pressures related to body image, and (3) receiving formal moral education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) classes, religious activities, and character development programs. The exclusion criteria included adolescents who did not exhibit indications of negative body image or did not participate systematically in moral education.

Supporting informants consisted of two guidance and counseling teachers from each school who provided contextual information on students' psychosocial conditions and the implementation of moral education. Secondary data were collected through documentation of the PAI curriculum, archives of religious activities, and student character evaluation records.

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted to understand student interactions within the school environment, particularly in the context of religious activities, PAI instruction, and social relationships with teachers and peers. Interviews were conducted with four female students and two school counselors, focusing on the three dimensions of self-compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, mindfulness) and on aspects of body image such as appearance evaluation,

appearance orientation, body satisfaction, weight concern, and body type classification (Neff, 2011).

Interviews with students were conducted in four individual sessions, each lasting approximately one hour, and all sessions were recorded with the participants' consent. Interviews with school counselors were intended to reinforce data triangulation by examining their observations of students' psychological dynamics and character development processes. The analyzed documentation included moral education modules, records of Islamic activities, and student development reports.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Sugiyono, 2021). Data reduction was performed by selecting relevant information from interviews, observations, and documentation. The reduced data were presented in narrative form and thematic matrices to facilitate the identification of patterns and meanings. Conclusions were drawn inductively through an iterative verification process and comparison across data sources.

2.5. Data Validity

Data validity was ensured by applying the four trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was achieved through methodological triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation), source triangulation (students and teachers), and theoretical triangulation (concepts of self-compassion, body image, and Islamic values). Transferability was reinforced by presenting detailed contextual and participant characteristics. Dependability was ensured by systematically documenting the entire research process. Confirmability was established through audit trails and cross-checking findings with empirical data and relevant theories (Dumar et al., 2024; Li et al., 2018; Neff, 2011).

2.6. Ethical Considerations

This study obtained ethical approval from the relevant educational institution and support from the participating schools. All participants signed informed consent forms, with guarantees of confidentiality and the freedom to withdraw at any time without consequence. The interview and observation processes were conducted with sensitivity, upholding empathy and respect for the participants' religious values.

3. Results

3.1. The Role of Self-Compassion in Addressing Negative Body Image among Female Adolescents at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta

In dealing with pressures related to body image, not all female adolescents respond in the same way. Some demonstrate the ability to address negative experiences with an attitude of self-compassion. This is evident from statements expressing efforts to accept their physical condition as it is, recognizing bodily changes as a natural part of adolescence, and refraining from excessive comparisons with others.

"I once felt insecure when I first started wearing the hijab permanently. I thought my face didn't suit the hijab. At that time, I even received negative comments from my classmates. But over time, I kept trying to be confident with what I have within myself." (Interview Result S-1, March 24, 2025, 09:58 AM)

"I'm not confident because I'm considered fat and dark-skinned. I often get teased by others, so I chose to be quiet." (Interview Result S-2, March 24, 2025, 09:58 AM)

"As a PAI teacher, I instill the value of gratitude in my students so they don't easily feel insecure." (Interview Result G-1, April 14, 2025, 10:45 AM)

"I always encourage the students not to be easily intimidated by others' words. Everyone has their own strengths." (Interview Result G-2, April 15, 2025, 10:35 AM)

These statements indicate the presence of reflective processes and self-compassionate attitudes, which are at the core of self-compassion. Each individual experiences insecurity due to perceived lack of self-confidence. Such insecurity often arises from differences in skin tone and body type compared to others. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers and parents to provide continuous guidance and motivation to help students reduce feelings of insecurity. Excessive insecurity leads to increased anxiety, as shown in recent findings ([Rahmadyani et al., 2023](#)). Insecurity is an internal discomfort felt by individuals when they experience worry and a lack of confidence regarding something ([Rahmadyani et al., 2023](#)).

SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta demonstrate a strong commitment to their female students' psychological well-being by integrating a self-compassion approach in addressing issues of negative body image. The application of this concept is particularly relevant among female adolescents aged 12 to 15, a critical period in the development of self-identity. Through this approach, both schools implement various programs that support positive mental development, aiming to foster a healthier and more realistic body image. In a social context shaped by media pressure and unrealistic beauty standards, the ability to show compassion toward oneself serves as a crucial safeguard for mental and emotional health. Therefore, strengthening self-compassion is not only a preventive measure against psychological risks but also a vital component of holistic character development strategies.

a. Mindfulness

Several adolescents practiced accepting their thoughts without excessive emotional reactions, for instance, by journaling or engaging in dialogue with counseling teachers.

"Start by doing good. Unknowingly, it will slowly change the way you see yourself. Try to greet people you know more often and always smile. Assume the burdens you feel don't exist—or at least aren't as heavy as you imagine. Don't keep imagining all the bad things that might happen—also imagine the good things you can achieve. Don't worry, you're not alone. Out there, there are people who will accept you. What matters most is your personality, your character, and the goodness you radiate—those will shape the environment around you. So believe in yourself. Don't hesitate to be kind. You got this!" (Interview Result S-2, March 24, 2025, 09:58 AM)

b. Common Humanity

Adolescents began to recognize that feelings of dissatisfaction with one's body are also experienced by others.

"In my opinion, being too skinny isn't good either. Having very small arms makes me feel like the weakest person—even opening a bottled drink is difficult. Also, I advise against using too much makeup. Not all ingredients in cosmetics are good for the skin, especially for those with sensitive skin. Instead of beautifying, it could damage your face. Feeling anxious is normal, but don't let it lead you to do bad things, like bullying others just because you've been through something similar. BIG NO to that! Let only those who have hurt us act cruelly—don't let us become like them. Always be your best self!" (Interview Result S-2, March 24, 2025, 09:58 AM)

c. Self-Kindness

Adolescents made efforts not to be overly critical of themselves when feeling dissatisfied with their bodies.

"I'm satisfied with what I have and proud of the person I've become, which is very different from the past. When I'm in that condition, I choose to focus on my hobbies—because I have more than one interest. I'm also grateful to be surrounded by people I know, and some have become close to me. It feels good to be among those who appreciate me. I've experienced painful things: being hurt,

insulted, gossiped about, even bullied. But over time, and with changes in my social environment, I find it easier to accept and feel content with myself. I just need to focus on improving the things that are still below my personal satisfaction standards (like grades, achievements, and talent development).” (Interview Result S-2, March 24, 2025, 09:58 AM)

Mindfulness, in the context of self-compassion, teaches individuals to face thoughts and emotions with presence and acceptance, helping them avoid negative rumination and manage stress more effectively. Together, these three elements form a strong foundation for practicing self-compassion, enhancing mental well-being, and strengthening individuals’ psychological resilience in the face of life’s challenges (Amaliyah & Budiono, 2024). The Millennial generation is more adept at practicing mindfulness in addressing life challenges, while Generation Z more frequently becomes trapped in over-identification with problems (Hasanah & Mediasari, 2024). Fundamentally, self-kindness is demonstrated by individuals through the act of offering themselves self-love. Meanwhile, common humanity is the recognition that individuals require acknowledgment from others, and that personal struggles are part of a shared human experience (Hasanah & Mediasari, 2024).

3.2. *Factors Influencing the Development of Negative Body Image among Female Adolescents at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta*

The development of self-compassion is influenced by a supportive school environment, the role of teachers and counselors, religious activities, and the reinforcement of moral character. At SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta, although the schools have policies to limit the use of social media within the school environment, its influence remains significant outside of school hours. Additionally, some students report feelings of anxiety and pressure when discussing their body appearance with peers. Interview data reveal differences in how body image is shaped within families. Some students stated that their parents placed pressure on them to appear physically perfect, while others reported that their parents emphasized personality and character over physical appearance. This suggests that families can play a dual role in shaping adolescents’ body image, both positively and negatively.

Although Islamic values-based moral education has been implemented in SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta, formal education that specifically addresses body image and self-acceptance remains limited. Students tend to rely on information from peers and social media to understand what is considered an ideal body. Consequently, a lack of deep understanding regarding positive body image and self-acceptance contributes to the worsening of negative body image among female students at these schools.

In addressing the issue of negative body image, the role of school counselors (BK teachers) and Islamic Education (PAI) teachers at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta is not limited to academic matters, but is also crucial in character development—particularly in fostering a healthy body image and cultivating self-compassion. According to interviews with a school counselor at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Surakarta, counselors actively teach self-acceptance through a humane and compassionate approach:

“Regarding specific cases related to body image, we haven’t identified many, but one student has attracted the attention of teachers. Since Grade 7, and now in Grade 9, she has consistently worn a face mask. When the counseling teacher asked her why, she said nothing was wrong. Eventually, we also asked her parents, who said she behaved normally at home. As a result, I, particularly as a school counselor, often initiate conversations with her in hopes of increasing her self-confidence. Also, students are allowed to use sunscreen at school, and sometimes this becomes problematic—such as after ablution, instead of going straight to prayer, they delay with the excuse of needing to reapply sunscreen and so on.” (G-1, April 14, 2025, 11:45 AM)

Based on the aforementioned findings, it can be concluded that negative body image among female adolescents at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta is shaped by both internal and external factors. Chief among these are the influence of social media, which frequently portrays unrealistic beauty standards; peer pressure; family upbringing; and past negative personal experiences. Therefore, it is crucial for schools to enhance students' understanding of healthy body image and support the development of self-compassion to help them respond to these challenges in a more constructive and resilient manner.

Body image refers to how an individual perceives, feels about, and evaluates their body. Among female adolescents, particularly at the junior high school level, body image development is influenced by a range of interrelated factors, including social context, family, media, and personal experience. These findings are in line with theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter II of this thesis, where negative body image—defined as dissatisfaction or feelings of inadequacy about one's body—is often rooted in strong external pressures. The following sections elaborate on the key contributing factors identified through interviews and observations:

a. Influence of Social Media

In today's digital era, social media plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' body image. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube often showcase unrealistic beauty standards, typically promoting slim and flawless body types. Although many of these images are digitally altered, numerous female adolescents feel pressured to conform to these ideals. This aligns with theoretical perspectives on the influence of media and sociocultural norms on body image.

At SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta, although the schools enforce policies to limit social media use within the school premises, its influence remains pervasive beyond school hours. Interview and observational data reveal that many students feel dissatisfied with their bodies after viewing social media posts featuring idealized figures. These findings demonstrate that despite regulatory efforts, social media continues to be a dominant factor in shaping female adolescents' body perception.

b. Peer Pressure

During adolescence, peer relationships are highly influential, and female students often feel compelled to meet the social expectations of their peer groups. Physical appearance frequently becomes a central topic of discussion, and dissatisfaction may intensify when adolescents perceive their bodies as misaligned with socially accepted standards. This is consistent with theoretical literature on the role of peer influence in body image development.

At SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta, some students report anxiety and pressure when discussing their appearance with friends. Interview and observational data reveal that certain students feel intimidated by peers' comments comparing their bodies to idealized beauty standards. Some even feel more confident when their appearance aligns with their peers' expectations. This phenomenon highlights how peer pressure can exacerbate negative body image among female adolescents.

c. Family Influence

Families play a pivotal role in shaping adolescents' self-perception, including their body image. Parenting styles, parental attitudes toward physical appearance, and family discourse on beauty significantly influence how adolescents view themselves. Parents who emphasize physical appearance or make negative comments about their children's bodies may contribute to the development of negative body image.

At SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta, interviews with students show varying familial influences on body image. Some students reported parental pressure to maintain a physically ideal

appearance, while others noted that their parents valued character and personality more than outward appearance. These findings suggest that families can simultaneously serve as both positive and negative agents in shaping adolescents' body image.

d. Personal Experiences and Past Trauma

Personal experiences, including bullying or past negative comments about physical appearance, can severely affect adolescents' body perception. Despite the implementation of anti-bullying policies at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta, some students still recall past experiences of being criticized for their appearance. Negative remarks about body shape—whether from peers or adults—leave painful memories and reinforce negative body image.

Furthermore, experiences such as engaging in strict dieting or attempting to alter one's physical appearance to meet ideal body standards are often associated with body dissatisfaction. Female adolescents who perceive themselves as not aligning with ideal body norms tend to follow unhealthy diet trends or resort to unnatural appearance changes, ultimately deepening their dissatisfaction.

e. Lack of Education on Positive Body Image

Although moral education based on Islamic values is integrated into the curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta, there is a lack of formal education that explicitly addresses body image and self-acceptance. Students tend to rely on peer discussions and social media for information about what constitutes an ideal appearance. This lack of structured, in-depth education on positive body image and self-acceptance contributes to the persistence of negative body image among female students.

In summary, negative body image among female adolescents at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta is influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. The primary contributors include social media's portrayal of unrealistic beauty standards, peer pressure, family dynamics, negative personal experiences, and the absence of formal education on body image. Therefore, it is essential for educational institutions to foster greater awareness of healthy body image and actively support the cultivation of self-compassion among students as a proactive strategy to address this psychosocial challenge.

3.3. The Contribution of Moral Education to the Development of Self-Compassion among Female Adolescents at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta

The moral education implemented at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta serves not only as a means of reinforcing moral values, but also plays a significant role in shaping self-compassion among female adolescents. Values such as *syukur* (gratitude), *ikhlas* (sincerity), *qanaah* (contentment), and *sabar* (patience), which are taught through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and religious activities, provide a foundational framework for students to build a more positive relationship with themselves. Islamic practices integrated into school life—such as routine religious gatherings (*pengajian*), short sermons (*kultum*), and Islamic character-building programs—create a conducive environment for the internalization of spiritual values.

“As a PAI teacher, I instill the value of gratitude in the students so that they don't become easily insecure.” (Interview G-1, April 14, 2025, 10:45 AM)

This teacher's statement indicates that gratitude, as a core element in Islamic moral education, functions as a strategy to foster self-kindness—that is, a gentle attitude toward oneself when facing physical shortcomings. Female adolescents who are guided to be grateful for their bodies begin to reduce feelings of shame or self-hatred.

Furthermore, the values of *qanaah* (feeling content) and *ikhlas* (sincerity) also play a significant role in encouraging students to accept their physical condition without excessively comparing themselves to social or media-imposed standards.

"I encourage my students not to be easily envious or feel inferior. I tell them that everyone has their own strengths. If they can accept that, they'll feel calmer and won't become easily anxious." (Interview G-2, April 15, 2025, 10:35 AM)

BK and PAI teachers actively support students in the process of self-reflection, helping them develop mindfulness within an Islamic framework—an awareness grounded in submission and humility before Allah. In religious activities, students are often invited to contemplate the meaning of human creation and the importance of valuing the body as a divine trust.

"We often link lessons on self-morality with concrete activities, such as reviewing Qur'anic verses about human creation or discussing the uniqueness of God's creation. From this, students learn that their bodies are not something to be compared, but rather to be appreciated." (Interview G-1, April 14, 2025, 11:45 AM)

Additionally, programs for Islamic character development—such as *halaqah* sessions, Islamic mentoring, and Qur'an-based personality development workshops—provide students with opportunities to share emotional experiences and cultivate empathy toward others (common humanity). Students come to realize that feelings of insecurity or pressure regarding physical appearance are common experiences shared by their peers.

Although there is currently no explicit curriculum that formally addresses body image, the moral values taught consistently across religious and character-building activities have demonstrably influenced the formation of self-compassion attitudes. In other words, moral education serves as a value-based foundation that strengthens emotional regulation mechanisms and fosters self-acceptance.

However, these findings also point to the need for curricular innovation or enhancement of PAI instructional materials that specifically address the psychosocial challenges faced by modern adolescents, such as appearance-related pressures, beauty standards, and digital literacy—factors that significantly impact body image.

3.4. The Impact of Self-Compassion on the Psychological and Social Well-Being of Female Adolescents at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta

Self-compassion, as an attitude of kindness toward oneself, has a significant impact on the psychological and social well-being of female adolescents. Within the educational context of SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta, the development of self-compassion is expected to assist female students in coping with the challenges of adolescence, including negative body image, social pressure, and feelings of inferiority. Through self-compassion, they are able to access essential emotional protection, which in turn enhances their psychological and social well-being.

"The impact of having compassion is that it brings peace to our hearts and builds self-confidence." (Interview Result S-2, March 23, 2025, 09:50 AM)

"After I started focusing on loving myself, I became more focused on studying and more confident in facing daily life." (Interview Result S-1, March 26, 2025, 01:58 PM)

Observations of students' daily behavior reveal that those with a higher degree of self-compassion tend to engage in more reflective thinking. They are also more receptive to feedback and criticism without feeling threatened. Teachers reported that these students exhibit improvements in learning engagement, willingness to speak in public, and composure in the face of exams or other forms of social pressure.

Self-compassion fosters personal transformation, including the development of *syukur* (gratitude), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *qanaah* (contentment), which contribute to the formation of a

strong inner self. Individuals who embody these values tend to develop a positive character and exhibit kindness toward others. This is referred to as *self-kindness*, which emerges from an internalization of gratitude, sincerity, and contentment. At the same time, individuals also cultivate common humanity by demonstrating a sense of shared human experience—most notably through empathy toward others.

Moreover, those who possess gratitude, sincerity, and contentment attain a heightened level of *mindfulness*, allowing them to analyze and respond to situations in their environment with greater awareness and emotional balance.

In summary, self-compassion—rooted in Islamic moral values—has a transformative effect on female adolescents' emotional resilience and social interactions. It serves not only as a buffer against psychological distress, but also as a foundation for the development of self-confidence, interpersonal empathy, and inner tranquility.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to understand how self-compassion supports female adolescents in coping with negative body image, to examine the contribution of moral education in shaping this attitude, and to evaluate its impact on psychological and social well-being. The findings indicate that self-compassion functions not only as an emotional regulation mechanism, but also as a foundational element for developing a healthier body image—particularly when reinforced by Islamic moral values. These results are highly relevant to the study's objectives and reinforce the initial argument that integrating positive psychology with Islamic spirituality holds considerable potential for strengthening the psychosocial resilience of female adolescents.

4.1. The Role of Self-Compassion in Addressing Negative Body Image

The study's findings reveal that female adolescents who cultivate self-compassion are able to respond to social pressures regarding physical appearance in more constructive ways. They exhibit a tendency to accept bodily changes as part of natural growth, reduce extreme social comparisons, and foster healthier relationships with themselves. These findings support the assertion that self-compassion can reduce the negative effects of over-identification and self-judgment (Neff, 2011). This study also confirms that self-compassion correlates with increased body acceptance and emotional stability (Annisa et al., 2023; Masyi'ta, 2023).

In contrast to previous studies that predominantly employed quantitative approaches, this research adds value by deeply exploring the subjective narratives of female adolescents. This addresses the methodological gap and enables a more contextual understanding of their lived experiences (Miles, 2017). A key finding is that self-compassion is not merely practiced as a cognitive strategy but is also internalized as a spiritual attitude through values such as *syukur* (gratitude), *qanaah* (contentment), and *sabar* (patience), which are taught in moral education.

4.2. The Interaction of Social Factors in the Formation of Negative Body Image

External factors such as social media, peer pressure, and family norms are shown to play a major role in shaping negative body image among adolescents. Exposure to idealized body images on social media can exacerbate feelings of self-dissatisfaction (Dumar et al., 2024; Li et al., 2018). These findings also align with social-cognitive theories concerning social comparison in digital media environments.

However, within the Indonesian context, the findings reveal that such pressures operate within a more complex value landscape—where Islamic norms and spiritual educational approaches also mediate social influences. When parents and teachers promote values such as

appreciating God's creation or prioritizing character over appearance, negative body image may be mitigated, even if not entirely eliminated. This phenomenon underscores the importance of understanding body image as a psychosocial-cultural construct that is not universal, but rather formed through interactions between specific cultural values and social structures.

4.3. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study makes a significant contribution to the development of self-compassion theory within religious and non-Western contexts. While the existing framework of self-compassion is grounded in a humanistic individualist epistemology (Neff, 2011), this study introduces a spiritual layer rooted in Islamic values. In Islam, compassion toward oneself is not only based on personal acceptance but also on the awareness of one's connection to God and responsibility toward His creation.

Accordingly, these findings broaden the theoretical domain of self-compassion by introducing the notion of spiritual self-compassion, wherein mindfulness is not religiously neutral, but transcendental. This has the potential to enrich cross-cultural research in positive psychology and invites critical reflection on the limits of the universality of Western models in conceptualizing emotional well-being.

Practically, the findings urge Islamic educational institutions not only to teach moral values normatively but also to integrate them into approaches for personal development and counseling. Spiritual mentoring programs, Islamic social media literacy, and self-awareness training based on religious values can be developed to help students cultivate a healthy and realistic body image.

BK and PAI teachers at SMP Muhammadiyah 7 and 8 Surakarta have acted as agents of change; however, a more innovative PAI curriculum is needed—one that explicitly addresses modern psychosocial issues, including body image, self-esteem, and digital social comparison. This supports the recommendation that religious education should not be confined to dogma but be adaptive to the psychological needs of adolescents (F. I. Sari & Ansyah, 2022).

4.4. Methodological Reflection and Limitations

This research employed a phenomenological approach that allowed subjective experiences to emerge authentically. However, the researcher's dual role as observer and interviewer may introduce interpretive bias, particularly within a highly cultural and spiritual context. As such, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Moreover, the small sample size and singular representation (female adolescents in Islamic schools) also constrain the scope of the conclusions.

Future research could employ longitudinal or multi-site designs to examine the dynamics of self-compassion over time or across diverse sociocultural and religious contexts. Validity could also be strengthened through a mixed-methods design combining qualitative insights with quantitative measurements such as the Body Appreciation Scale or the Self-Compassion Scale.

4.5. Directions for Future Research

Future studies may develop a new conceptual framework for Islamic-informed self-compassion, synthesizing established principles with spiritual values such as *tawakal* (trust in God), *ridha* (contented acceptance), and *ikhlas* (sincerity) (Neff, 2011). Gender-comparative and school-type comparative studies (Islamic, public, and secular private schools) are also necessary to assess the relative effectiveness of spiritual values in building resilience against negative body image.

Additionally, deeper exploration of the digital dimension—including visual literacy and media consumption habits—can further expand our understanding of causal factors and inform the development of educational and context-specific media-based interventions.

Overall, this discussion affirms that self-compassion is a vital protective mechanism that enables female adolescents to withstand social pressures related to body image. In the context of Islamic schools, moral values such as *syukur*, *sabar*, and *qanaah* function not only as ethical principles but also as instruments of internalization that support stronger self-acceptance. This study enriches self-compassion theory with a contextual spiritual dimension and offers practical guidance for developing character education that is responsive to the psychosocial challenges faced by adolescents.

5. Conclusion

This study affirms that self-compassion serves as an effective protective mechanism in helping female adolescents confront negative body image, particularly within the context of Islamic schools that integrate moral education. The three core dimensions of self-compassion—self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness—were identified in the participants' subjective experiences as strategies for responding to social pressure and fostering self-acceptance (Neff, 2011). These findings address a gap in the existing literature, which has been predominantly shaped by secular and quantitative approaches, by demonstrating that self-compassion can also be understood as a form of spiritual awareness internalized through values such as *syukur* (gratitude), *qanaah* (contentment), and *ikhlas* (sincerity) within the tradition of Islamic education.

All three research objectives have been satisfactorily addressed. First, it was found that self-compassion enables female adolescents to respond constructively to experiences of negative body image through self-acceptance and emotional regulation. Second, moral education was shown to contribute significantly to the formation of self-compassionate attitudes, despite not explicitly addressing the issue of body image. Third, self-compassion positively impacts psychological and social well-being, as reflected in increased self-confidence, emotional resilience, and healthier social relationships.

Theoretically, this study extends the concept of self-compassion into a non-Western context by proposing a preliminary framework of Islamic-informed self-compassion—an integration of self-awareness, acceptance, and spiritual values as a unified whole. This contribution enriches the discourse of cross-cultural positive psychology and challenges the presumed universality of Western frameworks in explaining adolescent emotional well-being. However, this framework remains conceptual and requires further empirical validation, particularly in comparative interreligious and intercultural contexts.

Practically, these findings highlight the importance of reformulating religious education curricula to be not only normative but also adaptive to contemporary psychosocial issues faced by adolescents. Value-based Islamic programs—such as spiritual mentoring, Islamic social media literacy, and character-based self-awareness training—can be developed to build psychological resilience and a healthy body image among students. BK and PAI teachers have demonstrated strategic roles in this process, though a more systematic and explicit approach is still needed.

The limitations of this study include the narrow scope of participants (four female adolescents from two Islamic schools in Surakarta) and the potential for interpretive bias due to the researcher's cultural and religious alignment with the participants. Additionally, the local Javanese context and the institutional character of Muhammadiyah as a moderate Islamic organization influence the shaping of moral values and self-perception among adolescents, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings to populations with different value systems, both within Islamic traditions and across religions.

To broaden the scope and enhance the validity of the findings, future research is recommended to employ mixed-method or longitudinal approaches and include populations from more diverse school, gender, and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, deeper exploration of the digital dimension—such as social media content consumption habits, visual literacy, and perceptions of body representation—is essential for a more holistic understanding of how body image is constructed among adolescents in the current digital landscape.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that self-compassion is not merely an internal psychological mechanism, but also a value-laden process constructed socially and spiritually. In the context of Islamic education, moral values such as *syukur*, *sabar*, and *qanaah* function as a bridge between the emotional and spiritual dimensions of holistic self-acceptance. The integration of positive psychology with Islamic moral education offers a new direction for cultivating adolescent resilience amid increasingly complex social pressures in the digital age.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Dewi Fitriah Khusnul Khotimah made substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work and revised the manuscript critically for important intellectual content. Mahasri Shobahiya supervised the research process and provided critical guidance throughout the project. Hafidz supervised the research process and provided critical guidance throughout the project.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interest's statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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