

## Growing Body Dissatisfaction among Woman: A study of the movie

### “I Feel Pretty”

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#### ABSTRACT

Under the light of the theories put forward by Foucault and his notion of power and to be more specific, those of biopower and biopolitics, power is constructive, difficult to resist, pervasive and normalizing force, one which often works both through and within the body, making it a central site of power. By the very concept of biopower what Foucault has in his mind are the diverse methods used to or rather aim to discipline, control and regulate the body. The rationale behind the use of various techniques of biopower such as normalization is that it works in the best interests of the population whether that interest relates to health, well being or lifestyle. Normality is held as the ideal and the aim of the normalizing techniques is to produce individuals who have internalized the discipline and thus became normal. One of the key weapons used by biopower nowadays is media which has a wide reach. Media propagates the hegemonic ideologies, discourses and practices of the society. Women are the major victims of this body disciplining process. American movie “I Feel Pretty” by Abby Kohn and Marc Silverstein is the story of a fat woman who is highly talented. But she is not confident about her looks. Accidentally she forgets how she looks and thinks herself to be pretty and that boost her confidence and she

achieves all her dreams. The movie is a kind of self realization made by the protagonist and a message to the society to stop judging people by their physical appearance.

**Key words:** Biopolitics, Biopower

## **Growing Body Dissatisfaction among Woman: A study of the movie “I Feel Pretty”**

Under the light of the theories put forwarded by Foucault and his notion of power and to be more specific, those of biopower and biopolitics. Human body is entangled in different power structures. Hegemonic understanding of body along with the role played by the discursive and other practices plays a key role in determining the normalcy of human body. Foucault's, explanation of power is that, it is a network of power relationships that work through discourse and hegemonic knowledge. For him power is not just having power-over something. Whereas Foucault concept of power is that it is constructive, difficult to resist, pervasive and normalizing force, one which often works both through and within the body, making it a central site of power. Not only is normalization one of the effects of power: the exercising of power is also “normalized” as it is often hidden inside institutions and everyday discourses and practices.

By the very concept of biopower what Foucault has in his mind are the diverse methods used to or rather aim to discipline, control and regulate the body. Biopower draws from and produces normalization and exclusion. And the ultimate aim of disciplinary power is to create “normality” as defined by the hegemonic discourse. Normality is held as the ideal and the aim of the normalizing techniques is to produce individuals who have internalized the discipline and thus became normal. Biopower, therefore, infers a sophisticated means of controlling the body, increased surveillance, disciplining and the creation of a self-disciplined individual who strives

for and is rewarded for normalcy. As Foucault says, “the goal is to create “docile bodies” that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault 180-182).

Unrealistic portrayal of women in media texts deals with the representation of woman's body as a spectacle. Media is strongly criticized for reproducing and extolling representations of unrealistic female figures. As a result young women, influenced by certain body images shown in films and advertisements, believe that being thin is beautiful. The discrepancy between media image and the real life image lead these young women to resort to undesirable ways of dieting and exercise which is viewed as a serious medical problem across the world. The dissatisfaction of body image starts almost at the age of fourteen in girls and it is often associated with disorderly eating patterns at the vital period of physical development. Disproportionate body images of women are often objects of fun and ridicule. This in turn, creates artificial standards for young college girls. Worldwide surveys have produced consistent evidence that a thin body is associated with personal, professional and social success. This impression is nurtured by the media texts which may not reflect the real life situation in multicultural societies of third world countries. Thus, in almost all media texts such as films, advertisements, beauty pageants and women's magazines, the norms of feminine beauty emphasize the ideal of slender body, which the media consumers across cultures try to follow. These overt representations of the idealized slender female form have harmful consequences for the self- perception of women who do not see themselves as complying with the stereotypes of feminine beauty. “Certainly cultural beauty in relation to body shape is promulgated to a significant degree through visual/verbal media texts” (Wykes and Gunter: 206). Women feature in media texts more often as slender and sexy. The argument that media causes eating disorders assumes not only that representations misrepresent but they inscribe directly women to train and shape and modify their bodies to

conform to what very clearly are impossible ideals. Besides, it is not only the media industry that describes and determines the image of women's bodies but also other industries such as fashion, beauty, fiction and even finance, all of which are aspects of the dominant capitalist culture. We are increasingly made to live in a 'publicity saturated culture' which is referred to as 'information blizzard' by Baudrillard (1983). Innumerable signals and messages are being produced and transmitted by the modern mass media within short time that they never acquire any meaning and significance for the people involved. In this process of bombarding the spectators with so many images the print and visual media across the world endeavor to sell themselves by selling sex and slenderness. Women, as a part of this business continue to feature as promoting these two aspects of femininity. In this process, they use their earning to buy the beauty as well as the body, represented by the media. Hence, both women's sexuality and earning power, which satisfy the liberated sensibilities of the female audience, are to a large extent, controlled by the common interests of patriarchy and capitalism, which are exploited by the media to the full. Women are buying their gender identity but it is described in accordance with the masculinity at the heart of patriarchy and the corporate power of the beauty industry. The research shows that stereotyping of women by media significantly affects the minds of young women and if they are not thin and slender then it increases their dissatisfaction with their own identity and worth. Studies on TV/ film-viewing audience show that glamorous body representations have greater impact on women spectators than on men. The abundant focus on size and shape especially in the case of film heroines sideline other aspects of a woman's personality such as histrionics, facial expressions, adaptability and the like which are more important terms of evaluation and comparison. In urban middle class societies obsession with weight is increasingly growing in the young girls. Many slimming centers charging exorbitant

prices have cropped up, alluring young and middle aged women. Hence the media representation of female body image exploits weak and psychologically disturbed young girls. In short, these images are politically oppressive and commercially exploitative.

Abby Kohn and Marc Silverstein's movie "I Feel Pretty" portrays the story of an ordinary woman who struggles with the feelings of insecurity caused due to her the so called "abnormal body". She kept all her dreams aside because of her lack of confidence in her physical appearance. And on one fine day, she decided to join a fitness centre, so that she will look beautiful like the female figures in her mind. But she had a terrible fall from an exercising machine and she wakes from the fall believing that she is suddenly the most beautiful and capable woman on the planet. With this new found confidence, she is empowered to live her life fearlessly and flawlessly. She achieves all her dreams. People started admiring her for the optimistic and confident attitude towards life. Another fall took her back from her dreams, thus she realized that she is very same Renee, who looks the same. Thus she goes back to her real hopeless self and started avoiding whom she loved and gained through her flawless nature. Finally she gets to know from her boyfriend Ethan about what happened in her life. And finally makes a self realization that physical looks are not barriers for creating a charisma of yours on others.

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