DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO FEMALE BEAUTY STANDARDS AND BODY SHAMING IN ERNEST PRAKASA'S MOVIE "IMPERFECT"

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Abstract

Movies are not just meaningless entertainment or place for escaping from reality. Movie will have a meaningful message if analysed seriously. This article explores the discrimination related to female beauty standards and body shaming instances portrayed in the movie Imperfect (2018) by Ernest Prakasa. This article focuses on how beauty privilege affects women around the world, more specifically in Indonesia, in the sense of how the women who are deemed to be more visually beautiful are often treated better by other people with no consideration of other personality factors, compared to women who are deemed conventionally less attractive. Many women are so focused on their obsession towards female beauty standards formed by culture and female traditions during these last few decades. The female identity portrayed in this film is a visual representation of how beauty standards dominate a large portion of the whole identities of some women, especially in Indonesia. By analysing the movie using representation and feminism theory, the messages of the movie about the position of women in society and how appearances become factors in determining beauty standards can be determined .The result of this research in the end shows what the kinds of beauty standards and discrimination depicted towards women, and also what such appearances represent in the movie.

Keywords: Beauty Standard, Body Shaming, Female, Imperfect Movie

INTRODUCTION

The concept of beauty has transformed to become so attached to physical appearance (Zeigler-Hill, 2016). For example, heterosexual males and heterosexual females tend to gravitate into favouring a few similar or opposite physical traits in the opposite sex, where the men favouring a youthful appearance, full breasts and lips, and a low waist-hip ratio in women, and the women tend to favour a masculine facial dimorphism, broad torso, and relatively smaller waist in men, but both seem to appreciate a degree of symmetry in facial and physical features (Sell, Lukazsweski, & Townsley, 2017). However, if we see beauty with a broader, more traditional perspective, then beauty can be interpreted as something we like, something that is attractive, charming or inspiring so that it can make us happy (Mautz et al., 2013). Based on this statement, beauty is a feeling of pleasure that appears in the perceptions of each individual, or as the saying goes, "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder" (Deftia A, 2019).

Many women are very focused, to the point of obsessing on improving their apparent beauty. However, unfortunately, many are too focused on improving their physical appearances, at the cost of ignoring the improvement of their other aspects. On the basis of physical improvement, many women are willing to go on strict, uncomfortable, even unhealthy diet routines, which in the past, has been proven to instead affect them cognitively, making them think more often about food, tend to want to eat more often and eat out of control (Seftiawan, D., 2018). This phenomenon has been gaining attention in the past few decades, including, lately, in the Indonesian film industry. The growth of the Indonesian film industry has been growing steadily, with the increasing number of domestic film productions and

the number of its viewers. Seftiawan also adds that the increasing number of viewers watching local films is certainly very beneficial for the growth of the national film industry, which in turn encourages and allows local filmmakers to produce more films, with higher quality.

The movie "Imperfect" received significant success in the Indonesian cinema segment by raising a topic that is quite sensitive but easily relatable for a lot of people, wrapped in a light-hearted romantic-comedy tone, which makes the delivery of the moral values in this film easy to digest, and appreciated by both the common audience and film critics alike, winning multiple prestigious Indonesian movie awards, including for Best Adapted Screenplay writer (Astari, 2020). Imperfect also succeeded to become nominations in Bandung Film Festival for Commendable Film Main Actress, Maya Cup for Selected Adapted Screenwriting, Bandung Film Festival for Commendable Music Arrangement for Cinema Films (CNN, 2020). This makes Imperfect Movie become one of the best Indonesian movies in 20th century. According to Pikiran Rakyat, Imperfect has nette an estimated 88 billion rupiah in revenue (Seftiawan, 2018).

Living life following "conventional" or "popular" beauty standards and going outside or even against your own principles, is a major issue/ plot point in the film. Body-shaming is unfortunately very apparent and common in various social circles in Indonesia, be it in a family, in school, in a workplace, etc. Rising in protest to these casual remarks would often cause you to be considered over-reactional or sensitive, and staying quiet will only allow these negative behaviours to continue and grow, while the recipient stays hurt in their silence.

The director, Ernest and his wife, Meira Anastasia, who also wrote the screenplay for Imperfect, were able to bring out the issue of body shaming in a light, chattering and laughable style, so that this sensitive issue is presented and forms a new perspective for those who witness it (Satu Harapan, 2019). Very subtly, this film invites us to reflect, whether we are part of those who often make fun of, or those who end up living by other people's standards. This relatable picture presented in Imperfect actually has quite a heavy and serious message, but thanks to the expertise of the two, the viewers are able to grasp this concept very easily.

Rara (Jessica Mila), who was born as the daughter of a successful model in the 90s named Debby (Karina Suwandi), has to live a life full of pressure from bullying, body shaming, and beauty standards because she has a physique basically the opposite of her sister, Lulu (Yasmin Napper). Rara is fat and has dark skin inherited from the genes of her father, Hendro (Kiki Narendra). On the other hand, Lulu is very slim and has a smooth and fair skin that she inherited from their mother's genes.

Despite having a body proportion and appearance that are not beautiful based on conventional beauty standards, Rara has a kindness that many other people don't have. She often helps as a teacher at a school for impoverished orphans, which eventually led Dika (Reza Rahardian) into falling in love with her, fully willing to love Rara for who she is. Rara is very grateful to have a lover like Dika, who can love Rara for her nature and is able to accept and love her physical deficiencies. This is in contrast to the romantic relationship between her sister Lulu and her lover George (Boy William). George is dating Lulu only to increase his followers on social media, as Lulu was also a popular public figure, not because he and Lulu loved each other sincerely.

Apart from having such an extraordinary kindness and taking real actions out of it, Rara is also a smart and very loyal friend. This is what led her to being good friends with Fey (Shareefa Daanish), Rara's colleague at the large

beauty products manufacturer called Malathi, where after a company manager resigns, Rara finally competes with Marsha (Clara Bernadeth) to take the vacant position. , however, Rara was at a disadvantage because the position also emphasized seniority and physical appearance to meet corporate clients, although Rara had previously had consistently better performance in her work.

This film tries to have us, as the audience, to face our insecurities and our perceived flaws with gratitude and pride. There is nothing such as a woman that is not beautiful. Every kind of body shape, skin colors, and physical forms have their own beauty. Beauty is not strictly defined by being slender, with bright white skin, straight hair, tall like a top model. Even today, many magazines use models with unique looks, even those with conventionally less attractive features. What this film wants to convey is that we must be grateful for everything that we have, and to turn our shortcomings into our strengths. Physical deficiencies that we have can be covered by advantages in other aspects, for example, more mature thinking.

This film also discusses how society always puts appearance above all else, giving a better treatment to those considered beautiful. The number on the weighing scale is not a measure of one's happiness, and beauty is pointless if you're unhappy in obsessing over it.

Research Question

As explained in the introduction above, the movie focuses on physical appearance of the characters in the movie; thus, this research tries to explain what kind of body shaming that are mentioned in the movie *Imperfect.* This research is trying to answer what kind of representation that is mentioned in this movie regarding to the physical appearance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Body shaming, as the name suggests, is the action of shaming or ridiculing another person by targeting their body shape, type, or other physical traits. It is a relatively modern term recently coined and used commonly, but the practice has existed for a very long time in various different cultures and societies.

Over the age, people of each culture have always had a definite notion of "beauty" which defines standards of body dimensions, skin colour and condition, hairstyle, or even how someone's facial features should look like. Some people are always too fat, too thin, too tall, too short, too dark, or too fair to fit perfectly into the standards of the society they live in, and it has repercussions that most people won't even realize in their everyday life. Body shaming may affect the mental and physical health in unexpected ways-both for the person doing it, and those who are on the receiving end (Times Now Digital, 2018).

1. *Film Representation Theory*

Everything we see and hear from media is a representation, or a portrayed image of an object. Over the course of the development of film and television in history, there has been a lack of diversity in representing certain groups of people, including women, people of color, and people who has less-than-ideal body composition, especially those who are overweight.

Representation is the act of recreating and presenting a set of symbols to deliver their meanings, and may take the form of a person, an object, or an event. Furthermore, Representation in film and television is constructed by the filmmakers and producers who create their messages in the form of films and programs, which will eventually be received by the audience, who will process it and make personal meanings of their own (Tawil, n.d.).

Representation is also how the human mind receives and processes information, essentially assigning their own meanings to symbols and signs they receive. Another way to explain the concept is the use of symbols/signs (sounds, images,etc) to relate, produce, visualize, or picture something that is seen, imagined, or experienced in a certain physical form. (Danesi, 2012).

2. Feminism Theory

In the 1960s, feminists tried to observe patriarchal literature that either appeared aggressive towards, or not include issues regarding women at all. From there, feminism theory evolved the main characteristics of inclusion as stated in a book called "Feminist Thought" by Rosemarie Tong and Tina Botts which are :

1. Women and femininity have become theoretical objects and included in a vast variety of academic studies.
2. Women and femininity, having been ignored for a long time in traditional academics are now conceptualized as being equal to other studies such as social or economic studies.
3. Feminism theory aims to observe patriarchal approach to literature through its link to issues regarding females, or more inclusive, "public" issues.
4. The previous dichotomy between the genders and their issues need to be erased or significantly adjusted (Tong & Fernandes, 2017).

Using the previously mentioned theories, this research explains the phenomenon of body shaming represented in "Imperfect". Representation Theory and its correlation in film is used as the grand theory of this research. This research explores how body-shaming is represented in the film, through the actions and dialogue happening between the film's characters.In addition, the researchers have chosen Feminism Theory as the support theory in this research, to explore how "Imperfect" discussed and portrays elements of patriarchal culture and literature, and how it relates to female beauty standards and body-shaming towards women in a broader sense.

METHOD

Being a literature review research, this research will employ on the breakdown, concluding, and categorizing both the primary and secondary findings in previous researches done in books, news articles, references, and journals on the internet that are made available for public educational use. The three main methods of data presentation include the textual, tabular, and graphical method. The data presentation method that is used in this research is mainly through text. Compared to the graphical and tabular form, textual data presentation allows the researcher(s) to focus and elaborate more into each part of the research, providing better context and interpretation compared to using graphs or tables. This fundamental method of presentation is not also more suitable than the other two since the data used in this literature review research are mostly using summarizations from previous researches, journals, and books, which do not include many numerical data values, are not quantitatively comparable between one and the other, nor does it have an easily observable quantitative trend over time. The drawback to this method, by nature, is that the data will take more time to read, and has more risk to create difficulties in understanding the information.

At first, the researchers will analyse and identify elements and parts in the film which include a depiction of body-shaming, or female beauty standards and its' pressure. The first part of the data collection stage will mainly consist of this step. In the second stage, the researchers will select and categorize the data collected in the first stage in order to be able to create a sound

structure for the analysis, and for the third stage, the researchers will utilise pictures to refer to the parts of the film that relate to the topic and how each depiction is created visually in the film. For the fourth stage, the researchers will analyse the data that have been taken and categorized and arranged with their respective pictures, and in the final stage, an interpretation and discussion regarding the collective whole of the data taken from the collection stage will be given.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Imperfect (2019) By Ernest Prakasa was a film that commented on the social issues regarding body image standards and how people try to live in that "ideal" image and this is a very relevant topic in this era. The body-shaming shown in the film is also closely related to how female beauty standards, especially among Indonesian women. This film was also the first and only film directly addressing the topic of body-shaming in Indonesia. Imperfect the movie is actually an adaptation from a best-selling novel titled "Imperfect: A Journey to Self-Acceptance", written by Meira Anastasia, Ernest Prakasa's wife. The novel itself is a compilation of her personal experience, and a message to herself about loving your own body (Marvina, 2019). This research aims to show the different forms of body-shaming shown in the Imperfect film, using the research methods stated before, this research will break down and analyse several scenes in the film and how those scenes relate to the theoretical framework this research uses. According to the feminism theory we have used in the previous parts of this research, "*Feminism theory aims to observe patriarchal approach to literature through its link to issues regarding females, or more inclusive, "public" issues.'* and in this context, we have isolated 4 points in the film that depict scenes which support the

representation of our data in this research, which include:

The scene from which this screenshot was taken is an example of the act of body shaming in "Imperfect" (2019) by Ernest Prakasa. In this scene, Rara is seen holding the loose parts on her stomach, thinking out loud about how nice it would be to be able to cut them off, when her best friend Fey handed her a pair of scissors in response.

In this scene, Rara's work colleagues negatively commented on Rara's physique, even comparing hers to their more slender figures. They are also shown multiple times telling Rara to learn to wear make-up properly, even discrediting Rara's work efforts in their professional meetings.

While Rara's boyfriend Dika was supportive and understanding of her, the opposite is the case for Lulu, Rara's sister. Lulu's boyfriend, "Boy" is constantly

demanding and pushing her to be perfect and to maintain an ideal image, especially in the social media which he was almost constantly on. On multiple occasions, Boy made Lulu insecure by telling her to let her hair down so it would cover her cheeks, which he deemed to be "chubby", and stated that it was not the ideal or beautiful image to show to his social media followers. in other occasions, Boy also told Lulu to change her clothes when she would wear one that his followers has already seen, as if to constantly show a new outfit in every appearance, and both of these behaviours have been shown to disturb Lulu.

Due to pressure from multiple sources including her family and some of her work colleagues, Rara finally decided to lose weight, eating a diet consisting mostly of fruits, and exercising regularly. When Rara finally reached her weight loss goals, however, she neglected her personality, and adopted several traits of her previous self before her transformation, even criticizing her boyfriend Dika's fashion choices which she previously adored, and eventually hurt the people close to her.

CONCLUSION

As shown by the evidences and discussion in the previous part, "Imperfect" is a film that highlights the discrimination related to female beauty standards and body-shaming, both of which are currently rising in popularity in various social forums and campaigns, especially for Indonesian women and the vast variation of skin types and complexions they have. It is not uncommon for those with darker skin to be targets of bullying, or pressured by beauty standards, which is very likely to cause them to have low self-esteem.

In the film "Imperfect" (2019) by Ernest Prakasa, multiple types of body-shaming and physical discrimination were shown, but the most prominent one is fat-shaming and skin color, done by some people in Rara's social circle, such as her mother's friends, her colleagues, even her work superior in the office. The researchers used Film Representation Theory as the grand theory, and Feminism Theory as the supporting theory to break down and discuss this representation of physical discrimination in the film, and how it served as a critic the social situations allowing this to happen in society. Further research needs to be done to discuss the finer details and nuances in the film and its messages, or to expand on the discussion on this film with different methods and perspectives. From the body shaming also, an image of woman represent their position in society. For example, those who are good looking or attractive by appearance are more easily accepted in society, however those who are less attractive, or even considered ugly are hard to be accepted in society.

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