



THE BAD IMPACT OF BEAUTY STANDARD IN AMERICAN CULTURE IN REASONS TO BE PRETTY BY NEIL LABUTE (2008)

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the Drama *Reasons to Be Pretty* (2008) by Neil LaBiute. The purpose of this analysis is to expose the issue of beauty standard impact in American culture. This analysis is also intended to expose how the contribution of fictional elements (character and action/plot) in revealing the form of the bad impact of beauty standard in American Culture. This analysis is related to the concept of feminism by Naomi Wolf.. The result of this analysis shows the female character gets the bad impact of beauty standard which are discrimination and oppression.

Key words: *Beauty, feminism, Discrimination, oppression.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Beauty standards have been a major issue for many years now. Beauty standards are still an endless debate and have not reached the end point until now. Beauty standards in every region and every continent are very diverse and different. Beauty standards in the continents of Asia and Europe certainly have far differences. This is due to the influence of culture and the development of fashion and the world of beauty in each region. The development of the issue of beauty standards in the world community has become something that has not been resolved until now. Along with the development of the era, the world's beauty standards also change and vary. This is of course very closely related to the strength of patriarchal power in the world community.

Women have been willing to change their bodies over and over to please themselves and others. Beauty standards are a form of social construction made and approved by a group of a society. According to the news article from The Beacon (2018), beauty standard is the socially created perception that physical appearance is one of women's most essential attributes, and something all women should aspire to achieve and preserve. The standard of beauty is essentially a

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variable standard of what it means to be attractive that is contingent on the feminine beauty ideals that are present in a given culture.

American beauty standards have strict expectations of physical attractiveness. The rules of beauty have changed throughout human history. In the U.S, Beauty standards have body type characteristics and fashion trends that classify a person as conventionally attractive in the eyes of the masses. Women will be considered attractive if they have certain criteria. Having a proportional body and will make it easier for them in everyday life. American standards of beauty have changed significantly over the years. Pale skin than tanning, curvy skin rather than thin skin, bathing is a choice, not a social norm. Today's society is not much different from the past, and the way the media portrays men and women has now become the standard of normal beauty in the 21st century. American people are very diverse and what is acceptable to gender, age or race differs from person to person. More specifically, American women share complaints regarding the unrealistic beauty standards that are set by the media and society

The discourse of beauty and femininity cannot be separated from the construction of a patriarchal culture. They give power to men on the one hand to give recognition to women's femininity, and on the other hand women to always seek recognition of their femininity from men. The process of socialisation is embedded in patriarchal values, where beauty is emphasised for girls, while independence and adventure are emphasised for boys. (Leoto, 2014) The standard of beauty created in western culture is the formation of patriarchal culture. The patriarchs created a standard of beauty that could make women feel insecure about themselves. The rise of cosmetics and beauty tools circulating manipulate beauty standards themselves. "Physical attractiveness is a major asset in sexual exchange and is associated with upward economic mobility in particular for females, and we also know that it brings substantial economic gains in the labor market" (Mulford et al. 1998; 1,566). Women are put under monstrous strain to look preferable delightful. Cosmetics has turned into an essential piece of many woman lives since it allows them the opportunity to change or rather to improve their looks and create confidence. It should be noticed that the very notices that case to open each lady's magnificence impart the thought that ladies are some way or another intrinsically defective without magnificence improving items. This subtext prompts body disappointment and subsequently low confidence in numerous ladies and features by and by the ongoing fight for control of ladies' bodies

The issue about beauty standard depicted in the novel *Reasons to be Pretty* (2008). The novel revealed the life of a young woman who becomes the victim of beauty standard in American social life. The bad mocking comes from this American women's society that makes her underpressured.

Playwright Neil LaBute wrote a series of plays known as the Beauty Plays, dark comedies that address our society's obsession with body image and appearance. Each play confirms the notion that people do extreme things in the name of beauty. This play begins with the life story of a young American girl named Stephanie. Stephanie is a girl who looks ordinary and unattractive. Her life is so monotonous and often gets pressure from the surrounding environment regarding appearance. She has a boyfriend named Greg. This pressure comes from

the environment and friends. Society is preoccupied with this notion. The characters are four working class individuals, living in working class neighborhoods, who are settled in their lives; they would not be on a magazine cover for their beauty. Physical problems and an unattractive way of dressing are the main problems that make Steph depressed and tend to be emotional. She has a boyfriend named Greg. Greg who refers to the new woman at work as “pretty” and to his own girlfriend Steph as “regular.” Using these labels ultimately damages their relationship and creates major life changes for the characters involved. Steph always felt insecure when meeting people. This pressure comes from the environment and friends. Physical problems and an unattractive way of dressing are the main problems that make Steph depressed and tend to be emotional.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The data is analyzed based on beauty standard in America seen from feminism perspective. In feminism literary theory, beauty standard comes from society that is ruled by the patriarchy. The elements of drama that is used The drama is analyzed based on character and plot of the story. Related to the data collected and the data will be analyzed based on beauty standard theory by Naomi Wolf (2002). Through this concept, it can be seen that bad impacts of beauty standards has two impacts; Discrimination and Oppression. From these impacts, researcher can show sequences of event beauty standard issue of character that occurs in the drama *Reasons to be Pretty* (2008) by Neil La Bute.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In This chapter will discuss about the issue of beauty standard and the in American culture in the drama *Reasons to Be Pretty* by Neil La Bute (2008). The drama refers to the bad impact that the female character faces on the drama. Beauty standard in America which oblige women should aspire the standard that created by patriarchal culture. The protagonist refers to the female character who gets the bad impact of beauty standard in their social life. The female character who dressed and look ordinary and regular often gets discrimination from the surrounding and her loved one, male character of the drama. The pressure from the social environment tends to make the female character feel oppressed. Thus, this chapter will reveal the bad impact of beauty standard itself to the female and male character. The meaning of the novel will be interpreted based on character and plot of the drama.

1) Discrimination

Beauty standards that created tend to make people compared one woman with another woman. women who have an ordinary physique or are even called bad and unattractive will tend to feel depressed and feel alienated from their social environment. The feelings that arise are often caused by discrimination in

actions and verbally by the people around them. It can be seen from the quotation above:

Steph : You didn't say anything about me compared to her ?
nothing no?

Greg : No, n, not in comparisons ?... nope

Steph : Or anything like that ? at all? You got this far dont
fuck it up now

Greg : I said... No, what I said was, I know what I said
now.... This is it.. I said like this. Yeah maybe Steph has not
got a face like that girls, maybe her face is just regular, but I
woulnt trade her for a million bucks” something like that.

You know. Was just

Steph : Regular ? (*Reasons to be pretty p. 16*)

Discrimination against women who have ordinary looks also occurs in the world of work. Women who are considered unattractive are often ridiculed by their co-workers and their environment. This is a reality in American culture that to be liked and get a place, you must meet the requirements that are attractive and beautiful and have an ideal body. Wolf (2002) stated that feminism on every level in the lives of Western women. Feminism gave us laws against job discrimination based on gender; immediately case law evolved in Britain and the United States that institutionalized job discrimination based on women's appearances. According to Schwantes (2019) Unattractiveness prejudice can be big impact of succesfullness of career, from the hiring process down to raises and future promotions of the next step of career, This type of unfair benefits can make many employees back from reaching their full potential and successfully utilizing their ability.

Women have been faced with beauty standards since they were little from the environment and the media. magazines or television show how the definition of true beauty. This is of course very closely related to the advertising of beauty products that they display to achieve these standards. in fact the media show that beauty does not exist since they were born. The media teaches that beauty must have an effort to achieve it. This can be seen from the following quotation above:

“Steph : I really do feel that, that im not this person who
gets off on looks or more, like physical side of man but its
the other way around.. shit you know?

.....Why do we feel that way, though, I wonder?Is it
maybe TV or magazines or something? Our mom telling
us that we are pretty no matter what we look like.. I not
sure. I just know that women throw every thing they've
got into their physical being and a main part of that, the
main part is the face. But nuts if I still break out on my
chin or anything.... Im thinking about all the rest of it, too
of course I am. The words he'll use to describe my breasts
or my butt or things like that and I think my face is one of

my better parts and he is talking about me like some old
buick out in the backyard (*Reasons to be pretty* p.34)

The doctrines embedded in magazines and television greatly affect the way women perceive beauty. The female characters in this novel say that they assume that everything shown on television and magazines is not the natural beauty they get since childhood. These are some of their efforts to achieve that standard. The impact of beauty standards in the media had a huge impact on the mindset of American women at that time. As stated by Wolf(2002) the big contradiction of positive and negative parts of magazines's message provoke extreme expression of women. Women are deeply affected by what the magazines shows them. The mass media preaches and provokes the idea of ideal beauty and how these ideals changes the women behaviour.

The media plays very big part in women's self image by reflecting and telling what women want to be attractive or beautiful (Jennifer, Shannon,2016) Beauty" is only visual, more real on film or in stone than in three living dimensions. The visual is the sense monopolized by advertisers, who can manipulate it much better than can mere human beings. But with other senses, advertising is at a disadvantage: Humans can smell, taste, touch, and sound far better than the best advertisement. So humans, in order to become dependable, sexually insecure consumers, had to be trained away from these other, more sensual senses.

2) Oppression

Women often get oppressed either verbally or physically. Like from coercion about how to dress to changing lifestyles. women often get pressured about things they don't like, such as how to dress and dress to look attractive. For men together with women who are beautiful and physically attractive is a matter of pride for them. This tends to give rise to a lot of coercion against women and this makes women feel and oppressed in terms of their identity and character. The female character in this drama is a person who is far from feminine according to the standards that the social environment wants. he often gets the doctrine to dress and look not according to his identity This can be seen from the following quotation :

Steph : (to herself) you are such a prick

Greg : That's even classier when you are wearingf a dress. So nice

Steph : Fuck you asshole

Greg : I never realized that until now, but its true. High heels and smutty mouth are perfect match.

Steph : Im trying to look pretty, all right ? Im stying to make myself feel better beacuse my former boyfriend- this guy that i gave a whole lot of my heart to couln't find me attractive and now it keeps me awake at night, wondering what's wrong with me. Why i'm so unpealling to him. Yeah im weraing a akirt tonight so that I can feel little sexier, or cuter, or you know.. what to hell do you care?

According to Wolf, "Women will always have the choice never to obey, and will deserve the condemn for obeying, to consider what the desires on their "beauty" of a board of power might be, the minute they know they can count on their fair share: that 52 percent of the seats of the highest achievement are be able to them. They will gete the accuse that they now get anyway only when they know that the best willingness of their one life will not be forcibly compressed" (2002, p.54). Mental oppression of women is a form of character assassination. women are forced to change their identity just to please men. This can eliminate women's comfort and lose their self-confidence

The problem of masculinity and coercion on the basis of which is also a form of oppression. The male character in this drama is a company employee with an athletic body. He sometimes also eats a food that can make his diet fail. Even the environment in which he works is a toxic one. For people who think masculinity is everything, paying attention to all food and anything touched is very important. . It has been discovered that men participate in unhealthy habits and attitudes that are detrimental to the entire society in order to reinforce their masculine identity on a regular basis. According to Rotundi (2019) public discourses often overlook that men, by suffering from daily pressures and anxieties to comply with social standards, do not actually perceive the privileges of which they are accused to enjoy through the maintenance of their powerful position in society. Men must everyday establish their manly identity by carrying out certain behaviors in order to be socially accepted. gender expectations that have been established by traditional masculinity-related standards. Early as early as childhood, those male expectations that men must meet in order to be considered "genuine" men, urge them to adopt violent and harmful attitudes that have been shown to be, mostly over time, dangerous to their safety and bodily and mental health. Additionally, customary standards. Men who are absolutely against femininity do so because it is viewed as a sign of weakness. This case can be seen from the following quotation :

Kent : I guess. If you wanna get fat it is.

Greg : Im not gonna be fat because i had one of these meals

Kent : You would be suppressed

Greg: Yeah. I mean athlete eat them all the time, Olympians and whoever

Kent ; Are you out running? Or swimming? Hmmm ? don't you see doing cardio or , or like lifting, nothin, athletes. Get away from that shit beacuse they's always active

Greg: Kent, it is fucking snack, take it eassy. (*Reasons to be pretty p.20*)

Existing standards are not only set on women. This also applies to men. Men are also required to have a body like an athlete as their role model. This is a deviation from masculinity or called toxic masculinity. Men are also required in the world of work to look like an athlete. This is reflected in the male characters in the drama. Kent's character feels that eating snacks will speed up weight gain. The principle that men are always synonymous with the gym and

strenuous exercise to strengthen the standard that they are masculine men and are recognized by the social environment.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Drama *Reasons to Be Pretty* by Neil La Bute (2008) reflects the issue of the bad impact of beauty standards in America. The drama with 2 acts shows the relationship between two working class lovers who are involved in a protracted argument. The female character in the drama is a woman who is very thin and has a boyish appearance. His appearance was very ordinary. This makes him the subject of conversation at work. Meanwhile, the male character is an ideal admirer of beautiful women. Based on the data that has been collected, it can be concluded that there are forms of discrimination and oppression found in the drama. Women will be pressured and even tend to be forced to do whatever it takes to achieve these standards. The beauty standards created by the patriarchy are actually embedded in print media such as magazines and television. From here, society is hegemonized that the standard of beauty is like what the media provokes.

Female characters in drama tends to always feel pressured and feel compared to their surroundings. This pressure has an impact on the mental oppression that he gets from the work environment even from the people he cares about. All his gestures and what he wears become the subject of jokes. Her identity as a girl who looks boyish is deliberately removed to meet the existing beauty standards

Women are also made sexual objects and the imagination of men. The more women meet these beauty standards, the male sexual desire will increase. This view also has a negative impact on the mental state of women. Women with ordinary appearance feel themselves unattractive because they are not ogled by men. This is also one of the reasons why women compete to do whatever it takes to be beautiful according to standards, which is nothing but to attract men's sexual desires.

Women have their own identity. regardless of body shape and appearance. the environment should not hurt and discriminate against women who are considered not to meet the standards of beauty created by the patriarchy. This can cause women with good intelligence and talent to be not considered because their appearance is considered unattractive. therefore standards and standards of beauty shouldn't exist because they make women feel oppressed

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