



WOMEN'S DISSATISFACTION TOWARD THEIR OWN BODIES IN BREASTS AND EGGS BY MIEKO KAWAKAMI (2020)

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Abstract

This research is an analysis of a novel entitled *Breasts and Eggs* (2020) by Mieko Kawakami. This research aims to find out how women's body dissatisfaction is portrayed in the novel. This research is descriptive qualitative research which uses body image and feminist lens to analyze the issues of this research. This research indicates that the novel shows three aspects of body dissatisfaction which are: negative self-perception of body shape, negative comparative perception of body image, and negative attitude concerning body image alteration experienced by some of the female characters. This research also indicates that patriarchal culture influences the creation of beauty standards through two things. The first one is through the media that promotes women in sexy figure. The second one is in the work place in which the men prefer Jiang Li with youthful appearance rather than Suzuka who is talented. In conclusion, Body dissatisfaction that is experienced commonly by women cannot be separated from the beauty standard created by patriarchal culture.

Key words: *Body Image, body dissatisfaction, women, patriarchy*

A. INTRODUCTION

Preference about body has been a never-ending topic throughout history. For women, perceptions of their personal features, notably their body shape and weight, affects their self-worth (Betz et al, 2019). There is a myth that says women with attractive physical appearance are also more likely to be succeed in both the social and economic spheres. This causes many women to make their dream body image as an important thing to achieve. However, many of them cannot achieve their dream beauty standard that later would lead to body dissatisfaction.

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Body dissatisfaction happens when someone does not like her or his physical appearance because it does not match the ideal body image she or he has within their mind which is usually categorized by having negative perception over their own bodies (Gruszka et al, 2022). Body dissatisfaction is also called as negative body image. Body dissatisfaction could lead to unhealthy habits such as over dieting, depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders like bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa (Grogan, 2008).

The ideal body images for women are different in every part of the world. For example, in some part of East Asia, especially Japan, as women are told that light skin is superior because it reflects wealth as light skinned women are seen as women who do not work hard under the sun (Clayton, 2020). On the other hand, darker skin is preferred in America since it is often associated with women who have a great deal of spare time and money to spend holiday in a beach in Victorian era (Mcilhargey, 2022). Some part of the world even has a more unique beauty standard like the Kayan Lahwi tribe who uses metal to make their neck looks longer (Achieng, 2017).

Body image is impacted by common social pressures from both women and men (Grogan, 2008). One factor that comes from those social pressures is culture. Culture refers to behaviours, emotions, and works that a community or a society produces. Individual body image level of a person is shown by how much that person feels satisfied with their whole body and adding the amount of acceptance of body determined by socio-cultural influences.

One cultural aspect that plays a big role in defining women's preferences in body image is patriarchy. Patriarchy seeks to exercise power by attempting to define what beauty is, controlling women's mobility, committing violence, and establishing social norms that affect women's lives (Women's UN Report Network, 2015). As a result, men have more power in influencing many aspects in life. It even contributes to the creation of ideal body image for women in various cultures.

Japan is one of the countries in Asia that cite a primary example of a strong patriarchy culture (Villa, 2019). Patriarchy has been a long-time part of Japanese culture and society. Patriarchy in Japan is strongly embedded in its culture and history. Since men are more dominance, the creation of the ideal body standard within Japanese women's mind is pretty much influenced by patriarchal culture.

This researcher uses a novel entitled *Breasts and Eggs* to be analyzed in this research. *Breasts and Eggs*, especially book one, is a novel that brings out body image as one of its themes. It was written by a Japanese Novelist Mieko Kawakami. The novel took place in Japan. Book one of *Breasts and Eggs* portrayed the relationship between its female characters with their bodies including the way they view their appearance and identities. Some of them are portrayed to be dissatisfied with their bodies. They are having a hard time to fit into the ideal body standard they have within their mind as a result of stress and pressures they received from societal beauty standard.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher uses descriptive qualitative research as the method of this research. To analyze the data, the researcher would use body dissatisfaction and feminist point of view to see the portrayal of body dissatisfaction and the contribution of patriarchal culture in shaping beauty standard in the novel. This research uses a novel entitled *Breasts and Eggs* to be analyzed. The novel is divided into two parts, *Book One* and *Book Two*. However, the researcher would only focus on *Book One* of the novel since the data concerned the topic of this research is only available in *Book One*. One of the major issues of *Book One* of *Breasts and Eggs* is body image within its female characters. The story begins with the arrival of Makiko and her daughter Midoriko in Tokyo to visit her sister Natsu. Beside visiting her sister Natsu, Makiko has another intention to come to Tokyo. She is in a mission to find a suitable breasts implants surgery around. Body image issue is strongly embedded in *Book One* of *Breasts and Eggs*. Not only Makiko who wants to have breasts surgery that is dissatisfied with her body, but the other female characters also experience the same thing. This becomes a common experience due to beauty standard in the society which is created based on many aspects, and one of them is patriarchy.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Portrayal of Body Dissatisfaction in *Breasts and Eggs*

1.1 Negative Self Perception of Body Shape

In book one of novel *Breasts and Eggs*, Makiko is described as the one who wants to get breasts surgery. She does not like the actual condition of her breasts that makes her want to change it through surgery. Makiko is having dissatisfaction towards her body. This can be seen in the following quotation:

“They’re dark,” she said. “I know. They’re dark and they’re big. No need to say it. I know they’re not pretty.”
(p.58)

The quotation above is what Makiko said about her breasts. From the quotation, it can be seen that Makiko has negative self perception of body. She evaluates her body and she is aware that she does not like the actual condition of her breasts by saying “*I know they’re not pretty*”. She also explains that the reason of this is because of the color and the size of her breasts by saying “*they’re dark and they’re big*”.

According to Hati & Soetjningsih (2021), negative self perception of body shape refers to a person’s negative thoughts about how he or she looks. This includes their negative belief, feelings, and views concerning the size, shape, and other physical characteristic of their bodies. As can be seen in the previous quotation, Makiko makes her own negative assumption about her body which makes her experience negative self perception of body shape.

There are many reasons why someone could make bad assumptions about their own bodies. For Makiko, it is explaining in the following quotation:

“They weren’t always like this,” she assured me. “Not until I had a kid. Maybe they haven’t changed that much. I don’t know. But seriously, they were nowhere near this bad. I mean, what the hell are these? A couple of Oreos? Not even. More like black cherries. Black mixed with too much red. But these are worse than a couple of black cherries. They’re the color of a flatscreen after you turn it off. The other day, I was shopping, and I saw one and I was like, shit, I know that color. Where have I seen that before? Oh, right. My nipples. (p. 58)

From the quotation, it can be seen that Makiko’s negative perception of her breasts started after she gave birth to her child. Indirectly, she explained her dissatisfaction towards her breasts focus on color and size. The way she said “*I mean, what the hell are these? A couple of Oreos? Not even. More like black cherries*” implies that she the major aspects she concerns about are the color and the size. Apparently, for women, breasts play important roles as the measurement of perfection. Having large breasts, looking young, tall, slim, and White, with, is how the media portrays the perfect woman (Cash & Smolak, 2011). This is also the cause of Makiko’s negative perception of her body to exist.

1.2 Negative Comparative Perception of Body Image

According to its name, people who experience negative comparative perception of body image would compare themselves to other to look and evaluate their appearance. This is started by evaluating other people’s appearance. This can be seen in the following quotation:

Without the slightest hesitation, Makiko scanned the bodies of the other women in the room, as if devouring them, especially the ones who stepped into the tub. It was embarrassing to sit beside her, to the point I wound up whispering, “Stop it, Maki,” but I seemed to be the only one concerned that one of them might take offense. She barely answered me. She didn’t care. At some point, I gave up and joined in her evaluation of the women in the room. (p. 52)

The quotation above set place in a bathhouse. Makiko and her sister Natsu went there together. It can be seen that Makiko is the first one to evaluate other women’s body in the bathhouse. However, she seems to be overdoing it. This can be seen by the way the narrator said “*as if devouring them*”. It can also mean that Makiko has strong curiosity and excessive attention in evaluating other women’s body as the narrator said “*It was embarrassing to sit beside her...*”. It can be implied that Makiko’s behaviour might be noticed easily by other women in the room. However, she does not care with the consequences of her action as the narrator said “*She barely answered me. She didn’t care.*” At the end, Natsu joined Makiko to stare and evaluate other women’s body in the bathhouse.

Evaluating other people's appearance and compared it to our own appearance is normal thing to do. One key of sociocultural aspect influencing young women's body dissatisfaction is appearance comparisons (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015), especially it is the good one. However, it would be a bad thing if it creates negative comparison. This can be seen in the following quotation:

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“The color, the shape.”

Some words came to mind—small and dark, but big in their own way—but I held off. What would the other bathers think of this exchange? Two women splashing in the tub, one glowering over the other with her arms akimbo, like a warrior. The best I could do was nod repeatedly.

“Okay, forget about the size. I already know that,” she said. “What about the color? Do they look dark to you?

How dark? Tell me the truth”... (p. 57)

The quotation above contains Makiko and Natsu's dialogue as the result of evaluating other women's body in the bathhouse. Makiko asked Natsu with questions about the appearance of her breasts. From the quotation, it can be seen that Makiko's main concern in comparing her body is the color and the size of her breasts. Makiko felt the constant need to ask Natsu's opinion after seeing other women's breasts. She wants to measure her appearance after seeing other women's appearance. However, the tone of Makiko's narratives, implied that she felt her body is less attractive than the breasts of the other women she evaluated.

1.3 Negative Attitude Concerning Body Image Alteration

Negative attitude concerning body image alteration is a person's negative ideas, beliefs, and emotions about the desire or willingness to change his or her physical appearance. One of the negative attitude concerning body image alteration in *Breasts and Eggs* is cosmetic procedure. This can be seen in the following quotation:

“I've been thinking about getting breast implants.” (p.36)

The quotation above expresses Makiko's desire to get breast implants. From the quotation, it can be seen clearly that Makiko wanted to change her breasts.

Makiko's desire to get breast implants implied her body dissatisfaction s over her breasts that she thinks are small. This can be seen in the following quotation:

Her speeches had two refrains: “I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna get big boobs,” and “Can I really go through with this?” (p.36)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Makiko has a strong desire to change her breasts. This can be seen by the way she said “*I’m gonna do it, I’m gonna get big boobs*”. Makiko is struggling with body image issue that causes her to think about getting breasts implants. Breast’s size is one of the common aspects that causes insecurity within women. Having large breasts, looking young, tall, slim, and White, with, is how the media portrays the perfect woman (Cash & Smolak, 2011).

2. Patriarchy influences on Beauty Standard

2.1 Patriarchy in Media

Patriarchy has shaped beauty standard for women in many ways. One of them is through media. The ideal woman is frequently portrayed in the media as having long hair, long eyelashes, full lips, enormous breasts, a small waist, rounded buttocks, and long legs (Cash & Smolak, 2011, p.174). In book one of *Breasts and Eggs* the portrayal patriarchy influence beauty standard through media can be seen in the following quotation:

As a kid, whenever I saw the naked women in the magazines that the kids in the neighbourhood got their hands on, or saw a grownup woman expose her body on TV, I guess on some level I thought that someday all those parts of me would fill out, too, and I would have a body just like them. (p.55)

The quotation above is quoted from Natsu’s narration in which she is expressing her thought about her body. The way Natsu said “*I would have a body just like them*” indicates that she is already influenced by the way the media, specifically the way television portrayed women’s body. The quotation indicates that the media supports patriarchy ideology in which women are often sexually objectified as can be seen by the way Natsu said that the TV showed “*naked women*”. It is supported by Laura Mulvey’s opinion in her essay as cited in Bordoloi and Srimathi (2020) in which she stated that Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema emerges on the concept of the of the Male Gaze.

Patriarchy influences media in shaping beauty standard. It gives a huge contribution to the creation of someone’s perspective about his or her own bodies. The beauty standard shaped by media focuses to attract men. This can be seen in the following quotation:

And what was I expecting? The kind of body that you see in girly magazines. A body that fit the mold of what people describe as “*sexy*.” A body that provokes sexual fantasy. A source of desire. I guess I could say that I expected my body would have some sort of value. (p.55)

The quotation above sets a clearer example of patriarchy’s influence in media. The media promotes “*sexy*” figure that provokes “*sexual fantasy*” indicates the

objectification of women's body by patriarchal society. This is supported by the way Natsu said that figure has "some sort of value". In patriarchal society, women are often used as the object of male desire. They are valued primarily based on their appearance and their ability to gain men's interest sexually. The quotation above cites an example of it through media that is influenced by patriarchy.

2.2 Patriarchy in Workplace

In the *Book One* of novel *Breasts and Eggs*, patriarchy also has a significant role in shaping beauty standard in work place. This can be seen in the following quotation:

Jing Li pretty much just sits there. Her Japanese is terrible, but the guys are all over her because she's exotic or something. That's fine, though, except sometimes they'd be like, Suzuka, we don't want to drink with you, go away, putting her down to make Jing Li feel good or whatever. (p.95-96)

Jiang Li is one of the hostesses that works at the same place as Midoriko. She is a new comer in that industry. From the quotation above, it can be seen that patriarchal culture that shape beauty standard also exists in work place. The quotation promotes that the uniqueness in appearance is more important than the ability that a woman brings. Jiang Li is described as an "exotic" person compared to the rest of the worker. Since the strong patriarchal culture that is embedded in society, the passage shows that men preferred women who are suitable with their desire. The validation of men is directed towards Jiang Li due to her unique appearance. In contrast, Suzuka experiences an unfair treatment. Despite the talent she has, she is still no longer valued by men because they already find a new girl who are prettier than her.

It can be said patriarchy shapes beauty standard in workplace so that women with pretty faces would have more chances to survive. Women with attractive physical appearance are also more likely to be succeed in both the social and economic spheres (Kuipers, 2015). This can be seen in the following quotation:

So Jing Li was like, okay, I get 2,000 an hour."

"Damn."

"Wait, though," Makiko said. "You should have heard it, the sound that came out of Suzuka when she heard that number. It was like a dying chicken. I honestly thought she was dying. But yeah, I never knew what Suzuka was making, until then. 1,400."

"Uh-oh."

"And that's after she fought hard for a raise, maybe a year ago."

"But she's been around so long." (p. 98)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that there is an unequal valuation of salary experienced by Jiang Li and Suzuka. Jiang Li is more powerful than Suzuka due to her unique appearance, even though she is not as talented as Suzuka. She is preferable by men because of her look.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This research reveals body dissatisfaction that is experienced by the female characters of the novel. It is found that Makiko experienced body dissatisfaction in three aspects. She experienced negative self-perception of body shape in which she criticized and made negative assumptions about her physical appearance based on her own thought. She also experienced negative comparative perception of body image in comparing her physical appearance with other women. Her negative comparative perception of body image is called an upward comparison in which she thought other women's breasts are superior compared to her. She also experienced a negative attitude concerning body image alteration in which she had a desire to change the color and the size of her breasts to be brighter and bigger.

The creation of beauty standard in the novel is mainly influenced by patriarchal culture that is strongly embedded in the life of the female characters. In the novel, it is found that patriarchal culture influenced the creation of beauty standard in media such as magazine and television. The media promoted women to have sexy figures and bodies who provoke sexual fantasy that later influenced Natsuko as the reader and the viewer to want such kind of body image. It is also found that patriarchal culture also influenced the workplace in which the men prefer Jiangli over Suzuka because of her youthful appearance even though Suzuka is more talented than her.

Finally, it can be concluded that in this research, body dissatisfaction is one of the most common issues that happen to women. This happened due to the mismatch between their actual appearance with the beauty standards that exists in the society. The creation of that beauty standard cannot be separated from patriarchal culture that is embedded in the society.

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