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## A CRITICAL STUDY OF FAT-SHAMING: A SOCIAL STIGMA

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### Abstract

Women's exploitation is unconfined or undeniable. This malpractice can be seen throughout the societies of the world. An exception of fat women's experience exists when a discourse is on women's exploitation from diverse perspectives. Their inner experience does not receive the same level of consideration or action as they are too who are being suppressed and harassed. Devaluation of her existence with her weight-based experience increases a stigmatic status in this world. The aim of this research paper is not to promote that being fat, overweight and obese is a good thing and we should accept it. Overweight is not healthy. It carries various diseases and many mental stresses. Nobody wants to be obese and to look ugly. But the primary objective of this research is to establish a notion that it is not a sin if you are fat, overweight, oversize, or obese. It is very okay if you are okay as you are. You have not committed a mistake. Although it is not healthy, it is not a sin either. The principle of this research is to document the proliferation of tyranny based on weight, stigmatization. Damaging discourse concerning the size of women's bodies is circulated through media ads, films, and other mediums that possess profound impacts on society in the construction of ideal women.

**Keywords:** Oversize, Thinness, Exploitation, Self-Destruction, Abuse, Societal Norms.

### Introduction

The disengagement of societies' ideal thin women figure with fat women excludes her from an ideal women's category. It may be, those fat women can be acceptable but her rich fairness and social status should exist then. Not only black beauty is hard to accept but fat beauty is also unacceptable in society. The existing idealized formation is an image of skinny with big eyes, pin nose, white skin, long hair, big hips, and big breasts, etc. This continuous unrealistic formation through these media becomes turbulent. This unrealistic world is fat women free and fixes the standard size of the body. The less or no representation of curvier bodies has excluded the acceptance of these types of size in a realistic society. If someone is crossing the normative size, has no right to the peaceful space in a thin or figured body world.

The years of discrimination based on body size is traumatizing. Women are reduced and limited to their bodies and appearance but the situation is heightened when no one understands this or believes that this fat-shame exists in the society as a stigma. The ideal figure women in the society were never from plus size group, they are absent from that ideal group and this systematic discrimination towards plus-size women is learned by the society without having to be told. The unopened mouths already put their words together and confiscate on oversize bodies through their staggering, gaze, dancing brows, and wrinkled nose. Plus size women are not only facing these types of harassment at home but they are subjected to be omnipresent. This continuous systematic oppression pokes you all the time till the realization and rely on it that because of your size you are unworthy and keeps away from the set goal of life. Fat shaming is not only a comment on fat women but it is an emotional, mental, moral, psychological exploitation. A general perception exists that fat women are careless and not focused just because they could not control their size. The absence of plus-size lead role women in cinema, serials, and songs; although these imitate our lives and we imitate these, allows us to put those fat women aside and give no attention. The body size and appearance give you the role and importance. Internal beauty and attraction are put aside; the first impression is your size that speaks loudly about your existence. Bodies of all sizes are good bodies but women who live in large bodies are considered weak, lazy, sexually or physically unattractive. They are not considered as beautiful. They are rejected and avoided. Actually, Beauty is more than a myth and this myth brainwashes women and allows them to believe that they have to look good to achieve something in life. Every culture and society has their different standards for beauty but there are some norms and ideals which exist everywhere for women and thinness is one of them or women are pressured to look beautiful. The beauty myth is a construction of certain qualities that are called beauty in society, and should try to get hold of. In the absence of these certain qualities, women are invisible and of no value in society. The beauty myth is a trap that is the basic cause of women's self-destruction.

### Advertisements

Advertisements are the source of beauty lessons or unrealistic beauty lessons. To spread the standards of beauty in society, these advertisements spread unrealistic images of women. Their diet food slogans do have a big impact on body image. Although various things affect and firm what size of your body should be. The mass media explicitly speaks to numerous without pointing to one. The presenting beauty size and the unrealistic image are unattainable and this toxic cultural environment forces women to achieve this ideal image. The continuous reinforcement of mass media on society fixes the definition of "Hot". The "Hot" word denotes the



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curves of your body with a fixed proportion on each level as Heavy breasts, heavy hips with curved waist, toned thighs. The ideal image of screens tells that this is the 'hotness' and you are a girl who should have this 'hotness'. It is also very clear that the propagated image or definition is much lesser in the real world.

The direct messages from the advertisements confirm your faulty and flawed body and teach that you will suffer in every sphere of life. Neither will they be accepted by their friends or family nor will succeed in the reputed field. The plus-size girls do not get decent attention, respect, or love. The continuous laughter on their size builds a thought to take weight reducing pills because according to the messages of advertisement, you have no life; being overweight has ruined your life so the option these oversize women think; only pills can solve their life. These advertisements directly humiliate or abuse their physical appearance. It conveys their message in a way that impacts a lot on fat people. The psychological effects of the comment lose these women's confidence. This is one of the effects of body shaming that it vanishes a person's self-reliance and makes them feel out of the ideal women's group. The continuous comment on body size and heavyweight or ugly looks vex a person's existence, confidence level, courage, and abilities. They start cutting off from the mainstream events by thinking that they are not appropriate for these, and these are not developed by only that oneself. It is a complete collaborative comment; constructed from family, relatives, friends, and society that forces fat women to isolate and to suffer psychological imbalance, and these are all; cause of body shaming.

### Magazines

Magazines also thrive on body shaming as STAR, VOGUE, and TOUCH magazines exhibit about the body that show these oversize women are not accepted in society. STAR magazine had dedicated its front cover to overweight women with circle marks on the extra fat of 45 celebrities with the title 'Best to Worst'. It denotes that if you are putting on weight and looking fat, you are worse. Your fat image doesn't engage with the ideal image of women. The fat body indeed possesses various diseases and problems but it does not mean that any woman wants to look fat or have extra fat on her body because it is known that these extra carries extra problems but the problem is, it is considered as a stigma or a shame in the society and these women are avoided and exploited. If anyone has blood pressure, cancer, diabetes, and many more, those are not considered as a stigma in society but being fat is worse because it does not engage with the ideal image of society that has been propagated by the mass media. Miss America, Gretchen Carlson endures body shaming, and that stays with her 'for life' and this experience leads her to her self-image issue. She feels that the pain of fat shame is similar to being of sexual harassment. "It is horrible. But it shows that shame hurts, and it stays with you for life. It's the same thing about being sexually assaulted or harassed. You keep it all in, right, and the systems help to make that happen that way. And you're scared to have a voice about it" (Mazziotta). This fashion or magazine industry gives a high-level offensive on "fear of being fat". "There is one crime against the modern ethics of beauty which is unpardonable; far better it is to commit any number of petty crimes than to be guilty of the sin of growing fat" (Richards 26). Being skinny is an economical symbol, the symbol of success, an important measure of success. "Beginning in the early 1900s, a thin body came to symbolize higher social status. If you were skinny. It means you had more choice in what you were eating as opposed to lower class people who, presumably, ate what they could find" (Richards 27).

As per the rules of some societies is that being thin exposes a sexist mindset. This kind of unrealistic thought of the society develops anxiety and depression in overweight women and they start skipping their meals to reduce their weight and somewhere they unknowingly or knowingly stop consuming proper meals. They start taking weight loss pills and the failure in this effort brings anxiety, depression, or ultimately it develops an eating disorder. The drastic situation comes when this body-shaming allows them to isolate and find solace or refuge in their world. They stop interacting with others and want to live in their world and find solace that they have lost in the slim, curved, or ideal women's world. This dangerous situation leads them to suicidal tendencies. They find death an easier way to reduce their body, depression, and high level of anxiety. It is very hard or not easy to end oneself but it is harder to live with being fat-shamed and bullied. Fat shaming is undeniable but it exists everywhere and with every plus-size woman. Many oversized women feel uncomfortable when they are sexually active with their partner because of their extra body weight. Many positions are difficult to exhibit and it leads to unsatisfactory sexual pleasure. The fears of rejection always force them to avoid intimacy or ultimately, they suppress desires. This intimation hour and quality time have already been fixed through many mediums in society; movies, series, serials, and songs are of them. These platforms never represent intimate scenes with overweight women. They focus on a woman's curve to highlight what is sexiness and present the minute detailing of an ideal woman of the society. It exhibits clearly what should be in an intimate relationship.

### Porn Sites

Porn sites are also one of them that has built criteria of an ideal female figure. These are with high height, curvy, slim perky, and tan bodies in viewers' minds. The continuous exhibition of women with their heavy boobs, hips, and thighs along with slim waist has made everybody's desire to have their women of this type of shape from tip to toe. This is an ideal image by mass media and also by society. The fear of being rejected always puts them in self-isolation or loneliness. Being overweight is considered a failure or lack of control of personal morality. It becomes a character flaw in society. Negative comments, continuous torture, and taunts make



oversized women's life vulnerable and it leads them to an imaginative world of their desired body which is acceptable in society. These comments, taunts, and weight loss suggestions have power or these harsh words have strong power to hurt them.

Society has already fixed its body dimension. This culture and its ideology of the perfection of the body are openly accepted in society. Plato believes that "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder" but the society that has already set everything for ideal women believes that Beauty lies in the size of the body. The size determines your beauty scale. When the set parameter does not engage with the size of size women then fat-shaming exists. Today various social platforms are doing the same thing and carry these societal dogmatic attitudes towards the size of women's bodies. Unlearning these dogmatic attitudes can heal those women's lives who are going to be fat-shamed. They can save themselves from anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, harmful pills, and distress. These weight loss pills, drugs, powder, and capsules all affect the human body and change the body drastically. No one has the right to abuse and fat-shaming is abuse. The cinema courage and keyboard courage exhibit some movies and novels that speak loudly about fat shaming.

### Fat-Shaming in Cinema and Literature

*Inji Iduppazhagi* (Size Zero), shot in Telugu- Tamil, a romantic comedy film that parades fat-shaming through Anushka Shetty as Sweetie. She is overweight, plus size, daring, and an independent girl. Her extra fat never bothered and stopped her from achieving what she wanted until the entrance of a boy named Abhishek; indirectly his attitude explains that her body is not attainable in society. Sweetie's mother is one of the persons who always worries about her oversized body and continuously makes her understand to lose weight and look slim and pretty. After the unsuccessful meeting with Abhishek, a meeting with his girlfriend who is a fitness freak and Sweetie's mother's continuous comments or taunts allow her to accept that she is not acceptable in the society with this extra fat on her body and she is not completing the societal criteria of an ideal woman. She tries a lot to lose her weight but all goes in vain and finally, she accepts the route which brings lots of problems. She joins an ultra-modern slimming center, called Size Zero run by Prakash Raj. It is a weight loss clinic that promises to carve your body and expose your cuts. It is the occurrence of societal unrealistic thoughts that made her think that her weight is an issue. She soon comes to know that the given weight loss drink is a kind of harmful drug which is given to lose weight; is creating various problems. Her friend Jyothi, becomes the victim of kidney problems because of taking weight loss drugs in the Clinic. Sweetie takes a stand for her and fights against the clinic that is promoting this plus size as a sin. This clinic and Satyanand's idea is the reaction of the existing societal unrealistic figure of an ideal woman. Very soon Sweetie understands that being fat is not a sin. She has not committed any crime. She is good-hearted, kind, and supportive, and all of the above she speaks against the wrong. She fights and wins everything with her weight. She tries to change this existing perspective on obesity and overweight in society and to her known person. The whole movie is with the messages that accept the size of your body as it is. Fitness is important and healthy for the body but without self-harm. Starving, avoiding food, taking pills, drugs, extra workouts all can ruin a life. The core idea of the film is to talk about the pressure that overweight women face.

There is another romantic-comedy Hindi language film, *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* that talks about an overweight women's struggle. Sandhya is educated, brave and bold; she is married to a dropout boy Prem who is an owner of a Video cassettes shop. He is not interested in this marriage, he feels embarrassed to walk with his overweight wife on the street, and her extra size always puts him down. She tolerates body-shaming until Prem insults her in his friend Nirmal's marriage ceremony in the middle of his friends. After consuming alcohol, he unfolds his inner feelings of hatred and jealousy. He feels like hell to be with her or to sleep with her. He hates to walk with her on the street; the reason is that she is overweight. Prem gets jealous to see Nirmal's wife. She is slim and looks beautiful. It is her complete qualification. But Sandhya understands that it is not a sin that she is not slim as other girls. Prem does not have respect for her. He feels hell to spend time with her. Sandhya slaps Prem as she hears this. Prem does not understand his mistake and slaps back. This whole problem occurs because he does not want to have a wife of extra size. Her body is a problem for him. He wants a Chuhi Chawla type body but he gets this size, "Size DekhahaiYuuuuuuunnnnn", "Chaha kya or payakya". He has no single interest in her. He got married to her because of family pressure, not by his own choice. "Jab rang roop hi nabhayekisi ka to kaisewikaarkarlun".

Sandhya receives "Moti, Sandani" such words because of her oversize. She wants only that someone does care and give respect to her but this marriage insults and does body shame of her. Only face and body size have value and harsh comments and taunts on these are not less than abuse. But as the film goes on, they reunite and win the "Dum Lagao" competition. In which Prem, who was feeling insulted to walk with his wife on the street, carries his wife on his shoulders and runs as well as faces all obstacles of the contest and wins the race. They realize that they can care for each other the way they are. Prem was struggling in his work and education. He is helped by Snadhya.

Society has a rigid definition of beauty or shape and fixed a confined area to qualify to be called an ideal woman. Overweight women are considered as comic relief, whether it is film or reality. Fat-shaming jokes are compulsory for oversize women of any class, color, creed, and religion. An Indian playback singer or the first comedienne of Hindi cinema Devi Khatri is famous for her name Tun Tun. She was an overweight woman with a comic persona, and so she was renamed by Nargis as TunTun, and then she



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became a permanent comic personality in various Hindi films. Generally, people gave this name to the people because of their over-size. Although Tun Tun got fame because she was talented but fat shaming somewhere hurt and stopped her from going far. She believes that the society that considers oversized women not useful and considers just as a comic character in other's life, this thought never allowed her to emerge as the finest singer. She says, "My name itself lures the people towards my programs. Maybe if I were not so fat and obese, I could have emerged as one of the finest singers in our country"(Khatri). But very intelligently and with her bright ability, she worked hard and shined in her profession. "I am perhaps the only artist in this profession who has not been rivaled by anyone bulk wise. My bulk is my trump card. I don't regret that I am fat. I'm lucky I was born this way. However, that does not mean that I am not in favor of dieting. I agree dieting is very essential to maintain a slim and healthy body" (Khatri).

There are many scenes in various films that show how oversized women are fat-shamed. As Pretty Zinta in *Kal Ho Na Ho*, tells Delnaz who is an oversized woman that she cannot find any guy until she loses her weight. This fat-shaming does not exist only in one age, it was continuously presented everywhere in every age even with more decisiveness. An incident of fat-shaming can also be watched in hindi-language *Shaandaar* film. The bride raised her voice against fat-shaming done to her, "I'm perfect the way I am". It slaps on those mindsets that think only slim size is perfect.

*Ujda Chaman*, a Hindi language comedy film that deals with the premature baldness of a bachelor but somewhere behind this serious issue of balding in society, this film also talks about an oversized woman, who is the victim of fat shame. Chaman does not want to have an oversized woman. She also dislikes him because of his baldness but Apsara very soon understands that this is not an issue to not have hair. She is of the view that it is okay if the person is caring and loving but Chaman takes a period to understand that oversized is not an issue and it does not affect any woman's inner personality. Chaman also starts dating his colleague, she is slim and beautiful for Chaman but in a minute he understands that she feels embarrassed when she takes him to meet her parents and asks him to wear a wig. He comes to the senses that Apsara is an oversized girl but her heart has more size and she was always honest and pure to him. Oversize is not the certificate that assures your character, yes it can be a personality enhancer but inner beauty never comes with your size. It depends on your heart and the size of emotion and feeling. Fat-shaming culture has already depicted oversized women as miserable and vulnerable. They are considered for entertainment purposes. The parameters of the fat-shaming culture put oversized women in a condition that they cannot rise. They are not worthy.

"I hate seeing fat girls on TV or in movies because the only way the world seems to be okay with putting a fat person on camera is if they're miserable with themselves or if they're the jolly best friend. Well, I'm neither of those things" (Amato 11). A young adult novel, *Dumplin* by an American author Julie Murphy, focuses on a plus-size teenage girl Willowdean 'Dumplin', resisting society's expectation of her body. The word 'fat' possesses emotional weight that speaks about the existing socially acceptable parameters of an oversized woman. Millie, *Dumplin*'s friend, is bullied for her weight. *Dumplin* says, "I'm fat, but Millie's the type of fat that requires elastic waist pants because they don't make pants with buttons and zippers in her size" (Amato 11). Windy allows the readers to witness her body without considering it as a stigma.

While representing the difference between what men want and do not in a woman, through the contrast between Wife of Bath and Prioress, Geoffrey Chaucer talks about the wife of bath and how she is of liberal thoughts in the middle age of stereotypical mindset. She thinks for herself, she has her voice. Chaucer has characterized her as fat and large; because of her blunt and unloving attitude. She has been presented as ugly and not representable and it clearly shows what men do not want. She has other characteristics too which are not liked by men but the point is that Chaucer has depicted that a fat woman is ugly and not representable. Never let any advertisement, magazine, and image tell you that you are not stunning or valuable, only just because you don't look like them. You have your set of standards in which you are comfortable with your size and thoughts. You are beautiful, stunning, gorgeous in the way you are and your firm confidence in yourself can reject the rules of this society. Family plays a vital role in any situation to teach the correct path. If all families educate their children to accept and respect each other whether they carry any size on their body size and curves then it would be easy to vanish fat shaming. There are various ways to represent or express yourself, not only your size determines your capability. Families always teach the importance of healthy food and healthy life but sometimes it does not go with ease. It would be very beneficial to unlearn the societies' cultural ideology concerning body type. There should be a hope of redemption that it is okay if you are oversized. Overweight women are as the rest are. They too deserve equal respect, love, and care in society. These works are eye-openers that spread body positivity and a notion of being the real. To conclude, the writer agrees with Margret Atwood's opinion, "Don't let the bastards grind you down".

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