

TOXIC BEAUTY STANDARDS REFLECTED IN PRAKASA'S *IMPERFECT*: A PSYCHOANALYSIS

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Abstract

Imperfect is a movie depicting the struggle of someone who is obsessed with toxic beauty standards. The researcher applies psychoanalysis theory which especially related to id, ego and superego discovered by Freud (1923). The purpose of this study is to find out what causes the main character of this movie to be obsessed with toxic beauty standards and to find out the experiences id, ego and superego which is related to her life. The data from this study were obtained from watching and analyzing the movie *Imperfect*. After analyzing this film, it can be said that the basis of beauty standard is neutral, corresponds to each individual's preferences in what they see as beautiful. However, the fixation on beauty standards could become toxic if one cannot let go of their obsession with the flaws that are visible on their body. Body neutrality movement arises to tackle this problem. It invites people not to put their focus on the aesthetics of their bodies, instead people should put their focus on the functionality of their limbs.

Keywords: *Movie Imperfect, Psychoanalysis, Toxic Beauty Standard, Body Neutrality,*

1. INTRODUCTION

Beauty standards come from society, and society starts forming an idea of beauty through comparison of one human being to another, and they set up unrealistic standards (Mateo, 2020). The fear of being a cast out for not adhering to those standards drove people to obsessed over the unrealistic standards to the point it affects their mental and physical health. People that are considered "beautiful" are more visible than the "ugly" people. This aspect of beauty standards shifts its neutral disposition into toxic beauty standards.

Society's perceptions surrounding beauty standards vary around the world. The same applied to the modeling industry in Indonesia in the 90's. Sabrina Sulaiman said, women are expected to have a long hair and bright tone skin since those are some of the qualities which men seek in women. In the 20's, a lot of foreign models that came Indonesia are demanded to have long dark hair to abide by Indonesia's beauty standards. (Sulaiman, 2021)

The practice of body neutrality is taking a body part that you may not be happy with and ask, what this body part allows me to do in life. (Barta, 2021). Body neutrality defines the idea of finding peace with our body and gratitude with what our body does for us. People can sometimes feel ugly about the looks of their body parts but still appreciate its functionalities.

The movie *imperfect* is adapted from a novel by Meira Anastasia entitled *Imperfect: A journey to self – acceptance*. This movie is directed by Ernest Prakasa and released in 19th December 2019. The movie *imperfect* conveys the struggle that Rara, the protagonist, faced against toxic beauty standard throughout her life. Rara has faced unrealistic beauty standard from the early aged. She got bullied do to her unconventional looks, dark skinned and fat body. She went to work in a beauty company in later life and once again faced another form of bullying. Receiving insults from co-workers and being denied of promotion unless she changes her looks.

This thesis explains the toxic beauty standards that is plaguing women around the world and it consequences to society and how they treat women as an object rather than a human being.

Based on the description above, this article wants to show and explain about the people who adhering toxic beauty standard. To analyze the toxic beauty standards in *Imperfect the movie*, there are some problems of study here as follows:

1. What standards apply to toxic beauty as reflected in the movie ‘Imperfect’?
2. What does the main character do adhering to the toxic beauty standards?
3. What social and personal consequences does the main character encounter as a result of her behavior?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Beauty standards are what a person perceives as their ideal beauty. This could impels a person to meet those standards and to some degrees it can affects their mental and physical health if the standards are not met. This is why beauty standards can be toxic. A person who is obsessed with their beauty standards will do anything to make their obsession come true. This behavior can damages their health and brings negative impact on those around them by carrying out horrible acts such as bullying and body shaming. For this reason, the role of the body neutrality movement is needed.

Body neutrality advocates to see the "body" not as an aesthetic object but as a source of life. The body neutrality movement invites people to be grateful for the body that can function well and focuses more on maintaining its health. It discourages the notion of giving an excessive attention to one's appearance and perceive it as their values as a human being.

3. METHOD

This article use qualitative approach. In collecting the data the researcher watch the movie, analyze, and understand the whole movie to know the details to get the information and to be used as study material to analyze and identify why the main character adhere the toxic beauty standards and what consequences does the main character encounter as a result of her behavior.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Toxic Beauty Standard Reflected in the Movie *Imperfect*

Toxic beauty standard is a strong interest towards adhering the beauty standard that has crossed the line into obsession. As explained in the previous chapter, individuals who adhere to toxic beauty standards treat themselves and those around them badly. Researcher analyzed the actions taken by the characters in the movie *Imperfect* which adhere to toxic beauty standard.

[Debby's friends are visiting Rara's newborn sister. While looking at the baby with a happy face]

Monik: *Her skin is very bright like cotton balls.*

Magda: *Luckily this one looks like her mother.*

[00:17 – 00:24]

The quote above explains that from Monik and Magda's perspective, Rara's sister is a beautiful baby because her skin is bright like her mother. Unlike Rara who has dark skin. According to them, children born with bright skin looks more beautiful.

4.2 Toxic Beauty Standard Adhered by the Main Character

After Rara accepts Kelvin's proposition to take the position as a marketing manager in Malathi, she undergoes diet seriously and work out intensively in order to change her appearance to be more beautiful. Subconsciously, Rara starts to instill the toxic beauty standards into herself and the people surrounding her.

Rara started browsing about strict diets. Consume healthy drinks and continue to exercise. Rara also regularly measure her weight.

[Rara cuts her hair]

Lulu: *Trim your hair to make it look pretty.*

[Rara begin to change the outfit she wears everyday]

[54:59 – 55:58]

Rara: *Fey [shows loads of lipstick at Fey] which do you think makes me more authoritative?*

[58:23 – 58:50]

From the two instances above, Rara's obsession with beauty standards begins to show. Rara starts following a strict diet, regularly measures her weight, even changing her appearance from hairstyles to how she dressed. She even meticulously asks Fey which color of lipstick would makes her appear as a capable leader.

4.3 Psychoanalysis of the Main Character

The researcher analyzed the id, ego and superego of the psychoanalysis theory from the data found in the movie *Imperfect*.

4.3.1 Id

In this section the researcher analyzed the id in Rara, the main character in the movie *Imperfect*.

Rara: *You don't understand. You'll never know what it was like to be me. Always being compared, always feel lacking, and now that I've changed like this, I'm still wrong? Why? You feel inferior because I am more successful than you?*

Dika: *those words could not have come out from the mouth of Rara whom I knew.*

[Rara and Dika are arguing, Rara feels that her efforts has not been appreciated. Dika doesn't recognize the current Rara anymore, Dika leaves Rara alone]

[1:27:17 - 1:28:35]

The dialogue tells about the misunderstanding occurred between Rara and Dika which caused the great fight. Rara lashed out her frustration to Dika about the insecurity she has suffered up to this point. Her id wanted to obtain validation of her success in improving her looks from the people around her. But Dika does not like the way she changed her old personality into the self-centered Rara which only cares about her looks. Dika's reaction was not matching Rara's expectation, which does not satisfy the needs of her id. Her superego had laid dormant the moment Dika expressed his disdain towards Rara. This resulted in her ego overwhelmed by her explosive anger that Rara could not control anymore.

4.3.2 Ego

In this part the researcher analyzed the ego in Rara, the main character in the movie *Imperfect*.

[Rara teaches Lentera school children. This time she teaches English material about colors. Rara asks what the Indonesian word for the color black, then one of Rara's students answers while mocking his classmate.]

Student 1: *It's black! Just like your face!*

[Student 2 retaliates by throwing insult back]

Student 2: *At least I don't have slanted eyes like you!!*

Rara: *Hey! That's enough! it's called body shaming, humiliating other people's bodies. Don't do it!*

Siska : *Gugun likes to do that!*

Gugun: *What!?*

Edo : *You like to mock my bucktooth teeth.*

Rara: *Anyway, you can't insult other people's bodies like that! Do you understand!?*

[1:27:17 - 1:28:35]

The quote above represents Rara's good attitude towards people around her before she became obsessed with toxic beauty standards. Rara reprimanded her students who mocked the body shape and skin color of other students. This is Rara's normal ego state. She understands that body shape and skin color are something that we are born with and we cannot choose how it looks like.

4.3.3 Superego

In this section the researcher analyzed the superego in Rara, the main character in the movie *Imperfect*.

[Debby's friends arrive at Rara's house and see Rara who has gained weight again]

Monik: *Are you not exercising anymore?*

Rara: *I still do. But, exercise is meant to keep our body healthy, not to be skinny.*

Magda: *But you are pretty when you're skinny, Ra.*

Rara: *[Smiles] But being beautiful does not mean you will be happy.*

[1:49:30 – 1:49:45]

Due to the treatment of the people around Rara, her obsession to look perfect is getting stronger as she unconsciously follows the toxic beauty standard. This incident made her realize that her unhealthy desire had made a bad impact on herself and the people around her. Rara was finally able to realize the fault in her way to fulfill her needs. The conflict has finally reawaken Rara's superego, the idealistic tendencies to follow through things properly according to one's ideals, to balance out her irrational

impulses created by the id. Rara managed to change her mindset towards body neutrality, attempting to fulfill her needs through a healthier way.

4.4 Conflict

There are 2 conflicts contained within a story, which are internal conflict and external conflict. Internal conflict is experienced by a character with them self and external conflict is experienced by a character between others characters or group.

4.4.1 Internal Conflict

In the movie *Imperfect*, there is an internal conflict experienced by Rara's character. Below is the conflict experienced by Rara.

[Rara mumbled that she wanted to have a thin body but she still ate in large portions.]

[38:25 – 38:38]

The quote above shows that Rara desires to have a thin body but Rara does not have the urge take any action to make her wish comes true. Even Rara still deludes herself eating in large portions which won't be of any help to achieve her desire.

4.4.2 External Conflict

In the movie *Imperfect*, there are also external conflicts experienced between Rara's character with several other characters. Below are several external conflicts that occurred in the movie.

Rara: *Fey, don't you want to try makeup to look more feminine?*

Fey: *What the heck.*

Rara: *I am serious Fey.*

Fey: *No!*

[1:04:54 – 1:05:01]

[Rara and Fey arrive at the cafeteria and are greeted by Marsha and her group]

Marsha: *Oh my gosh, your shoes are so cute!*

Rara: *Thanks. Turns out it's not that hard to wear it when you're used to it.*

Irene: *That's right! Did you hear Fey? don't you want to try wearing heels?*

Wiwid: *Just try it, Fey, it makes you feel more dignified.*

Rara: *Yes, Fey. It's also good for posture. [Fey is getting uncomfortable and leaves the table that Rara is sitting at with Marsha and looks for another empty seat. Rara menatap kepergian Fey dengan perasaan yang bersalah.]*

[1:05:34 – 1:05:56]

The external conflict happened was between Fey and Rara as well as Marsha's group. Fey chooses to leave Rara and Marsha's group's table because Fey feels uncomfortable with Rara's remark on Fey's appearance which they think is not feminine. Whereas before Rara changed her looks to be more feminine, she never judged Fey's appearance.

4.5 Researcher's Personal Attitude

After conducting this research, the researcher does not agree with the existence of beauty standard because everyone has their own perception of beauty. From the point of sociological perspective, people who are obsessed with toxic beauty standards will judge badly of those around them who do not hold the same view of beauty standards as them. These people will commit horrible acts such as bullying and body shaming. From the psychological perspective, someone who is shackled by the toxic beauty standards will pay their unduly attention to the flaws that blemish their body. They will be preoccupied to make their appearance beautiful and perfect for hours on end until their flaws are not visible anymore. People who are obsessed with this will not hesitate to take the extreme method to get rid of their flaws even though their health is at stake.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

After the writer analyzed the finding and discussion in the previous chapter based on the film *Imperfect*, the writer concluded the research on the toxic beauty standards reflected in the film as follows:

1. Beauty standard is a reflection of the preferences each person possesses, therefore beauty standard does not harbor any positive nor negative value. Beauty standard might become toxic when a person cannot let go of their obsession with the flaws on their body. As a result, they treat themselves and those around them badly. On the other hand, body neutrality invites people not to focus their attention at the aesthetics of their bodies, but rather at the functionality of their limbs. In body neutrality, a person does not need to love how their body looks, appreciating and maintaining the functions of their limbs become the sole focus.
2. Rara adheres the toxic beauty standard due to her childhood experience of being bullied and body shamed by the people around her. She grew up to be someone who was obsessed with slim body and a feminine appearance. Rara's obsession caused her to push aside the relationship she had with her closest people and neglected her health as well. This resulted in her blackout due to her low blood pressure and carbohydrate deficit. Rara prioritized her new founded group who had the same perception on beauty standard; she ended

up casting aside the people closest to her. Rara looked down on people who did not adhere the beauty standard similar to her own.

3. There are 3 concepts of theoretical psychoanalysis, namely Id, Ego, and Super-ego. In the journey of Rara's character in the movie *Imperfect*, the dynamics of the three psychoanalytic concepts struggles to gain power over each other inside Rara's psyche. Rara has been bullied and body shamed since her childhood by the people surrounding her because of her unconventional looks. This encourages Rara's superego to believe that she does not deserve to be called beautiful. Her superego became the predominant force that molded into Rara's insecurity. Until one day Kelvin offered her the position of marketing manager if Rara could change her appearance into the slim and beautiful version of her. This opportunity triggers the id (subconscious innate desire) to escape from the grip of the superego, her desire to be seen as beautiful and treated as equals. This instinctual desire manifested into her obsession towards beauty standards, which impelled her ego (conscious) to go on an unhealthy diet and giving excessive attention on her looks. Her obsession resulted in badly damaged relationships with the people she cares about. The conflicts she had gone through made her realizes the mistake she had done. In the attempt to fix what she had broke, Rara's superego managed to suppress her id and stabilized the power dynamic which constantly pulling the ego from each side. The balanced dynamic allows Rara to try to improve her attitude by embracing body neutrality and shifts her goal of keep exercising to be healthy and not just to be beautiful.

5.2 Suggestions

From this conclusion, the author suggests that we have to put more effort into understanding the dark side of beauty standard and its effects toward an individual's psyche, since it is very close to everyday life. Someone who is obsessed with toxic beauty standards will bring about a bad impact on them self and to people around them. Therefore, we should be grateful for the functionality of our body regardless of its shape and strive to maintain its health.

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