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### Study on Body Shaming In Movies

#### Abstract

‘Body shaming’ is the practice of making critical disgraceful comments about a person’s physique or weight. Movies influence the society and attitude of the people towards one another. This paper intends to show how ‘body-size’ is being visually represented by analyzing two selected films of South India, *Da Thadiya* (Malayalam, 2012) and *Size Zero* (Telugu, 2015). It shows how the social stigma of ‘body-image’ affects the life of a person in a society where the concepts of gender, race and sexuality play vital roles.

Key Words: Body-shaming, Body-size, Body-image, Plus-size, Fashion, Beauty, Overweight, Obesity, eating disorder.

## Introduction

Movies always influence the society and the attitude of the people towards each other. Whenever the films portray 'fat men and women' as 'ashamed' in front of the society, the audience take it as a chance to disapprove the people similar to the characters of the story. When society gives much importance to appearance, fashion and physique, the world continues to associate beauty with thinness. Someone who appears more than the so called 'actual size' is considered as 'physically excessive' or 'morally inadequate'. Movies, as they are the visual representation of the ideas, generally show the fat people as inferior when compared to the admirable 'size zero'. But in some of the movies like *Da Thadiya* and *Size zero* we can see how they make the audience explore certain ideas to make these people dominant and give them voices rather than considering them as a laughing stock in the society. These representations can always give confidence to people who suffer body shaming in real lives and such messages can lead to the breaking up off the existing social stigma against one's 'body'. There are various studies that intend to remove negative remarks that are linked with the 'fat- body'. There are also various movements related to 'body shaming' that includes the size acceptance movement that began in 1969 with the formation of NAAFA, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance by Bill Fabrey. The protests and campaigns like the 'Fat Acceptance Movement' in Sweden, are examples of women fighting against the abuse of body. During the 1970's a group of fat women who worked for the ones with an extra body- size was formed in Los Angeles. They considered the words like 'obese' and 'overweight' to be something more medically unfit which always hinted a desirable 'ideal' weight. With the support of NAAFA they replaced the words like

‘overweight’ and ‘obese’ with that of ‘fat’. Scholars explain how the views about ‘fatness’ had undergone an extreme change in the United States when the ideas of ‘healthy and attractive’ was replaced by that of ‘ugly and unhealthy’ during the late 19th and early 20th century.

‘Body shaming’ is a modern term that has been in practice for a long time. Body shaming can influence a person in many ways. It can lead to mental stress and ‘eating disorders’. Also, when we live in a society which only praises or gives chances for the ‘slim’ which is regarded as ‘beauty’, there are a large number of people, especially teen agers who consider themselves inferior due to their huge body. Body shaming can be related to overweight and the disability of a person to function normally. ‘Obesity’ is an important aspect, when we consider body shaming, which can lead to serious health issues if not treated properly. Movies, in general, express the theme of body shaming either in a dramatic line or in a comic manner. Thus this act of creating humour from such a serious issue can lead the public to have a mocking attitude towards the people with an extraordinary body-size. Media plays an important role in establishing certain body image as ‘ideal’. These concepts are commenced through cinematic representations, which often look into the pain and suffering apart from ‘mocking’ fatness. This paper discusses the visual representation of ‘body shaming’ especially ‘fatness’ in the movies *Da Thadiya* (a 2012 Malayalam movie) and *Size Zero* (a 2015 Telugu movie). A comparative study of these movies leads to related topics like the concept of ‘beauty’ in relation to ‘body-size’, ‘ill health’ due to self-treatments and some positive elements than can provide confidence regarding health and physique for all sizes. South Indian movies mostly use the ‘extreme fat’ characters to evoke humour which gives the viewers to get an idea that they can always mock those characters in real life and they are socially not acceptable.

## About The Movies

*Da Thadiya*, a Malayalam movie directed by Ashiq Abu portrays the life of a fat young man named Luka John Prakash. In the movie he is called 'thadiyan' which means a fat man by everyone except his grandmother. The name equates him with the size of his body. Luka is still happy with his life and people around him. But there is a change in situation when his childhood love, once a very fat girl, comes back in a thin beautiful look for a surprise. This makes him feel uncomfortable for his body size and then Luka goes for Ayurvedic treatments in order to lose weight. The movie also depicts how the helplessness of the fat people are used for the sheer profit and benefit of the consumerist industries. The film ends with a positive outlook when Luka makes use of his extraordinary size and impresses people to become the Mayor of the city. Thus the thought that success shall not depend on mere physique is shown through the movie.

*Size Zero* is a 2015 Telugu movie directed by Prakash Kovelamuch. This movie tells the story of a fat woman named 'Sweety', who is bold and independent. She is a woman of confidence but this faces a change when the man of her dreams falls in love with another girl who is so called size zero beauty. This makes her feel very inferior and believe that all this happened due to her huge body size. This leads her to join in a weight loss clinic but later she finds out how unhealthy are the practices there and how the use of deadly machines takes place in the name of losing weight. Throughout the movie her mother prays for her to get a suitable bridegroom which makes her even more insecure. The rest of the movie is about Sweety's fight against the clinic with the support of her dream boy who later falls for her. The movie ends in a positive note where Sweety, marries the man of her own choice without any adjustments in her current figure. Thus she becomes successful as a result of her confidence and trust in herself.

In the film *Da Thadiya*, the main character Luka is bullied by the characters in the movie because of his obese nature. Half of the film consists of the scenes which contain making fun of his fat nature. In the prologue of the movie Luka is portrayed as a fat child who is fat but happy. He loves to eat food and that apparently makes him fat. There is a scene in which he walks down the street and some kids make fun of him by calling him “da thadiya”. In another scene he writes a song about his dream girl which consists of certain Kerala food savouries, which makes him more vulnerable to becoming fat. At a certain point of the film, Luka’s fat body becomes the main reason for disappointments in his personal life. The main venture of this character is to reduce his obese nature and make sure that he becomes leaner so that ‘Ann’, the girl he always has feelings for shall fall for him and the both of them could live their life as beautiful as he imagined. Luka is bullied from the start to the part where he is admitted in an ayurvedic medical care which treats fat people as low esteemed minds. Luka feels a bit down after some incidents in the hospital as he only gets to eat somewhat half a food an average man eats. These scenes make the audience laugh and at the same time make the fat people feel insecure of their nature. The main turn of events occur when he sees Ann, once a fat young girl who turned out to be a slim and beautiful young lady who laughs at Luka when she meets him after so long. When Luka starts to have a conversation with her, his friends make fun of his apparel and his discomforts due to his weight and she finds it to be hilarious and all of them laughs at the scene. He loses his self-esteem and curses himself for being fat. All these scenes consist of mainly the main character Luka being bullied over his fat appearance. In another scene of the movie, Luka while ordering his food with his friends gets a huge list of items and eats every single bite of it without even sharing. His friends get surprised over what he did and make him a laughing stock during their casual conversation. As the story goes on Luka realizes the bright side of life rather than the one about physical appearance and he gains back his self-esteem. On the

contrary, Luka finds himself in a painful situation as he couldn't eat the food he loves anymore when he was admitted in the hospital for reducing weight. This made him sad and weak. The film is filled with scenes where Luka is made fun of his fat appearance. He even dresses absurd and holds his stomach in a way that his belly doesn't drop out. The only person that doesn't call him "thadiya" is his grandmother and this makes Luka a little confident. Finally at the climax of the movie Luka survives all the abuses and finally overcomes his fear of being called 'Fat' and gets his redemption.

The movie *Size Zero* also contains similar instances as of the above movie *Da Thadiya* but in this case it shows the life of a fat girl who is independent and bold. At the beginning she is not at all ashamed of the way she looks and is cool with even the people commenting on her weight, but the problem arises when she finds out that the man of dreams have fallen for another girl which happens to be a size zero girl. This makes her think that everything happened because she was overweight. Sweety now tries to reduce her weight in many ways with lot of struggle. As shown in the film, she becomes tired of running, doesn't eat her favourite food or eats less food. The other factor is that her mother prays to god that Sweety shall marry a good man though she is over-weight and this makes Sweety even more uncomfortable. In some of the scenes when Sweety drives her scooter, the tyre gets punctured due to her weight. After many attempts she finally decides to go the hospital where she finds out there are many people like her and make new friends. This scene depicts the face of humanity over variation in their physical appearance. In another scene, Sweety's shirt rips off as it couldn't control her obese structure. Sweety also goes to the gym where all of the other women make fun of her body. Sweety dreams of spending time with her man who she loves but finds it impossible. After several attempts to reduce her weight she finds out that various supplements and surgeries only destroys the human health and later on Sweety plans to

terminate the operation of these medical facilities. At many instances in the film *Sweetie* is called fat ,big ,giant and even referred to as an elephant which makes her feel more fat.

## Conclusion

A comparative study of both the movies shows that, they have many similarities which show clearly the mentality of the society regarding fatness or body size. In both the films, the protagonists are always criticized for their body size, but they eventually come out of their so called 'unattractiveness' successfully. They were considered sexually not admirable and rejected by the ones they love. Thus this shows how the people around them showed aversion or indifference towards 'fatness'. The only ones who support them during all the phases of their lives are their grandparents, which show that 'body shaming' is a new trend. Though both the movies represent characters who were insulted or humiliated by the society at first, but later they end in success, even in the way they exist. Thus, 'the acceptance of the society' towards these lines makes clear that there are some of the very, rare movies that illustrate the idea that fat too is beautiful, there is a need for such development of minds in the society, which can change the existing negative social, cultural and medical approach towards weight or bulkiness. People always look for better ways of life out of confidence and safety. But often people end up comparing each other. Society always gives more pressure in looking good to have importance in the modern world of fashion and fitness. But the views of the people are fast changing that make them protest against body shaming especially that of women. Thus we can see various changes like how plus sized models are even taken into consideration apart from all the controversies. Also, even the celebrities speak up for their rights regarding their own body. Thus it is important that we remember, men and women of different sizes colour and ethnicities deserve respect in their own levels and it's not our 'body size' but the size of the heart that matters. 'Empathy' and 'justice' are more important than

being 'skinny' and fair. And thus everyone ought to realize that there is nothing more beautiful than self-confidence. And the visual representations that show us these must be encouraged to lift up our society to new heights of equality and positive changes.

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