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I. Introduction

Although media appearance norms influence women's perceptions and behaviours, thus allowing body disorders to thrive in such standardised discourse, the tendency to promote the slender female body ideal has elicited little academic attention (Bordo, 1993a). Since scholars have yet to comprehensively address the media environment and related socio-cultural meanings (McGannon, and Spence, 2012), this essay aims to integrate research on media depictions by evaluating socio-cultural change, gender politics, and self-identity, based on an intersectional viewpoint on femininity and body image.

Thus, the following question examines such a feminine ideal by addressing: *To what extent do female body representations create an intersectional understanding of media discourse?* This argument necessitates a preliminary examination of sexuality's historicity and the role of media in such feminine body depiction. Second, this paper will provide an understanding of how patriarchy, market capitalism, feminist criticisms, and Foucauldian conceptions of bio-politics are crucial to the media discourse around today's feminine bodies' socio-cultural representations through a study of intersectional theoretical frameworks. The key analytical component is based on an inquiry into how media impact women's self-perceptions by imposing a restricted picture of society's female beauty standards; how women objectify their own bodies by internalising an ideal figure that causes ill health; and how such media processes promote self-surveillance, forcing women to conform and objectify themselves to societal power constructs.

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II. Background Context

a) *The Historicity of Sexuality and the intersectionality of media discourse*

Sexuality and the of media discourse evolved as a response to the European Industrial Age, according to the idea that civilizations could be dominated by an ideal ethnic representation of body image, differentiated by the somatic components of the "other" inferior colonised cultures (Weeks, 1981). The colonisation endeavour established an objectification system where the development of various racialized characteristics was intertwined with the establishment of a dualistic worldview. While colonists' female bodies were seen as the ideal mainstream symbolic picture of beauty, the colonised ones were regarded as a less respectable non-Western representation of a deviant female form (Doan, 2006; Robinson, 1976). Such a trend for sexuality studies shaped the post-colonial era to become the basis of a mainstream media discourse (Wieringa, and Sívori, 2013). Sexuality, and especially female body representation, was imagined in the format of central core interactions from a Eurocentric perspective, akin to the imperial world map: the "standard" being the usual white skin, a thin woman figure at the core, and the "deviant, "other", curvaceous woman on the periphery (Bleys, 1995; Epprecht, 2004).

The dominant discourse on sexuality and women's bodily dominance served as a primary indicator of social distinction during the 20th century, as post-colonial notions of sexuality replicated the colonist construction of non-Western women's identity (Hyam, 1991; Stoler, 1995). (Post) imperialism, the Cold War, and the emergence of capitalist international development ideologies and policies all had an impact on female instructions of normative bodily practises, and sexual subjectivities (Ahmed, 2005; Loomba, 2005; Manalansan and Cruz-Malavé, 2002; Manalansan, 2003). Bhabha (1994) highlights how globalisation and transnational institutions impacted the portrait of sexual identities from the end of the 20th century. Conceptual frameworks are aimed at the instruction of a female body type where the Western media dictates over what the ideal female body image should be like, while nations in the Global South are viewed as representations of the less-than-ideal minority culture embodied by the "other" female body (Spivak, 1999).

In post-9/11 communications, such perspectives became the mainstream socio-cultural

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representation of women's sexual body images and the fundamental instrument of social control. Right-wing Western politicians used populist instigation of nationalistic "clash of civilizations" media networks in anti-immigration movements which attacked women's sexuality as a means of disconnecting from the historical female otherness of colonies (Wieringa, and Sivori, 2013). Undoubtedly, the diversity of current representations of women (across traditional media as well as the internet) and the manner in which they encourage disjunctive femininities demands a more theoretical understanding to examine how the female body has become the media discourse construction of socio-cultural representations.

b) Theoretical understandings of sexuality and media discourse

Women's bodies are made available for debate, dissection, and exhibition in today's dominant Western culture (Wykes, and Gunter, 2004). Gender relations are reproduced in the media discourse of body images. This is understood by feminist critiques, who offer an understanding as media representation being kinds of neoliberal mechanisms central to women's exploitation and oppression (Blood, 2005). Feminist perspectives agree on the fact that the images of femininity should be presented as polysemous, wide, and continuous. This is explained in relation to the proliferation of the concept of women's bodies being consumers and seekers of identity in the media everywhere ranging from opera performances to the internet (Wykes, and Gunter, 2004).

While feminist critiques point to the neoliberal marketisation of women's bodies, Malson (1998) discusses the patriarchal image of media discourse, where men retain the societal decision-making power whereas women are elucidated as the 'aesthetic' sex (Bordo, 1993a, 1993b; Wolf, 1990). Heidensohn reinforces such a viewpoint by claiming that patriarchy is embedded in women's femininity of compliance (1985). This is because women are taught how to be polite, in terms of personality and behaviour. Counihan (1999) argues that the Western value of patriarchy is probably the means used by the media to achieve effective neoliberal commerce that depends upon a specific construction of femininity (1999). Put differently, gender representation and the socio-cultural construction of women's bodies rely on the mass media to promote neoliberal policies because the media supports a climate wherein women's bodies are a legitimate site of reconstruction and a legitimate market for reconstructive products (Counihan, 1999).

Constructivism contributes to such a theoretical discussion as the ideal female body has been reduced to a patriarchal, neoliberal image of what it means to be a conventional family member and ideal consumer (Basu, et al., 2001; Mohanty, et al., 1991). Accordingly, constructivists view fashion, nutrition, fitness, and cosmetic re-modelling as construction sites to which popular culture and the majority of neoliberal consumerism have become contemporary socio-cultural femininity devices (Billig, 1991). Thus, the neoliberal analysis of women's body representation is aided by the construction of femininity and designed through media discourse, which has supported Western power through cultural forms and the human behaviours they foster (Wykes, and Gunter, 2004).

Foucauldian conceptions of sexuality and bio-politics, which refer to myriad strategies used for subjugating (female) bodies and controlling people (Lemke, 2001), is an important theoretical concept that has contributed to this debate. Foucault (1978) claims that sexuality has become a mechanism for the sovereign to govern human behaviour, resulting in a new type of female bio-political subjectivity. Biopolitics and the concept of women as docile bodies have become integral parts of the governance of colonies in the past and the present nation-states (Foucault, 1985). Thus, bio-politics is relevant to the current debate because it is being exploited as a tool to regulate and self-regulate women's bodies (Pigg, and Adams, 2005). They denote the central site for the construction of sexuality, as well as the policing of counter-normative images that are deemed dangerous to the patriarchal order's stability concerning what is conformally patriarchal and what is "subversive" (Bruner, 1990; Orbach, 1978). Eventually, the separation between the two is aided by intersectional conceptualisations of feminist criticisms of patriarchal and bio-power theories; an intersectional theoretical understanding transmitted through the media to define and regulate the typology of women's bodies that shapes socio-cultural representations.

III. Analysis

a) Mainstream media representation of the female body

The conventional media idealisation of slim femininity subtly compels women to be slimmer, skinny, and tender (Garner, 1997). This allows certain prescription of standards socio-cultural mainstream representation of beauty leading to a perception that the "morphed" female form represents "standard" femininity and "ordinary" gender roles (Morris, et al., 1989). Butler (1990) opines that gender is done to us rather than by us, as it is inscribed on the body. The socio-cultural images of female bodies are delivered not only through mainstream pictures of skeleton bodies but also through a discursive context where feminine pictures have social value. In this context, the mainstream media has a role to play, through their omnipresence, viewership, marketing, and assertion of continued patriarchal dominance (Silverstein, et al., 1988; Silverstein, et al., 1986). It can be argued that the media's portrayal of femininity is continually entangled in a socio-cultural

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construction developed by a gendered worldview whereby the worthiness of women is linked to their sexualisation. As Blood (2005) claims, if it is not politically proper to broadcast sexually suggestive tales, then (women) news is just not worthy to broadcast. The everyday story of womanhood in our media uses repetition, regularity, and authoritative sources to provide a mythological character that lends the impression of truth (Levi-Strauss, 1958). Media give us a picture of femininity that is restricted, white, and patriarchal — it is a view that serves men's and businesses' interests (MacDonald, 1995).

The ideal woman's body must be slim, devoid of "excess hair", deodorised, scented, and elegantly dressed in society. According to Orbach (1988), women must adhere to an ideal body shape in which girls are taught to "groom" themselves correctly through networking from the time they go to school to when they come back home. Through the decades, femininity models have always promoted ideals of flawless femininity and such notions have percolated through media channels from one generation to the next. Accordingly, in mainstream media, women are presented to the public if they are married, heterosexually open, parental, thin, but also economically appealing and renowned (Bruch, 1978). In other words, a slim body form is linked to personal, career, and skills to succeed.

b) Food, dieting, and the anxiety of standardised bodies

Food may take on a negative meaning for many women in an obsessive media discourse since it is perceived as a source of weight gain (Chernin, 1983; Orbach, 1978). Food pleasure supposedly constitutes a temptation that must be subdued by restricted eating habits to achieve some socially accepted beauty standard. Despite academic findings of cross-cultural disparities in body form standards, evidence has begun to emerge that non-Western groups, particularly those who have interacted with Western society, exhibit Western-style weight and shape anxieties. For example, a study conducted by Wassenaar et al. (2000) explored the linkage between negative body images and dieting attitudes among white and Asian women living in London. The researchers found that such connections were comparable links to blend into Western culture for fear of being decriminalised.

According to Blood (2005), the influenced image of women alters a cultural context that relies on promoting capitalism by utilising women's desire for independence and income, while convincing them to criticise their physiques so they can spend lavishly on measuring up to the socially acceptable standards of beauty. Wolf (1990) referred to this as a predominant dual-nature culture that expects women to conform to certain pre-determent criteria of beauty to enjoy themselves while being persuaded their true selves are inadequate; yet, they need not fear as they are capable of acquiring the projected self - a feminine copy.

Women impacted by mainstream adverts and media advertising are more likely to want to lose fat, according to large-scale polls (Button, et al., 1997; Serdulla, et al., 1993). From the 1980s until today, 82% of women globally started dieting or limiting their eating; this tendency has continued to grow annually (Jacobovits, et al., 1977). Explanations for these disparities have progressively been directed to the media discourses perpetuated by a patriarchal society where women need to be appealing to men who are the true breadwinners (Streigel-Moore, et al., 1996). Accordingly, feminists allege that an idealised, slim female form is over-represented, with potentially negative implications for women who suffer from eating disorders (Orbach, 1978). Certainly, the main mass media played a pivotal role in propagating the cultural ideal of beauty. Modern advertising, shopping, and entertainment systems develop vivid ideals of beauty that pressurise women to adhere to the prevailing body shape craze.

c) Power and docile female bodies

Many women's self-perceptions are now mediated by body image discourse/knowledge, which is actively building the cultural meanings we assign to diet, nutrition, and body dimension. A constant obsession with calories, nutrition, and skinniness that primarily affect women may emerge as the most influential normalising strategies of our millennium. This may ensure the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining "docile bodies" who become obsessed with self-improvement and modification to adhere to such lofty standards of beauty (Bordo, 1993a).

As the effects of power upon the female body lead women to passively become societal docile bodies, other meanings or interpretations of women's negative experiences with food and body size are hidden, Specifically, surveillance through dieting and body shape make women establish what is "normal" and classifies them with respect to this standard (Jeffreys, 1985). The power of regulating dominant discourses of femininity shapes the way traditional feminine practises (such as dieting and other body-management strategies) educate the female body in ways of complying with societal standards, although these practises are frequently viewed as "power" and "control" (Bartky, 1988).

These norms effectively influence and define women's wants, feelings, and identities within the practical site of mainstream magazines and newspapers, including "training" women on how to view their bodies in contrast to that norm (Bordo, 1993a). Such normalised views of a feminine body cause women to become subjugated by societal power

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through daily practices, as societal power forces female bodies to accept patriarchal dominance (Bartky, 1988). Thus, women alter and even mutilate themselves to identify with standardised socio-cultural depiction. A woman must cultivate a beautiful self-image to be attractive to everyone else. Otherwise, she will be scrutinised and judged as an "otherising", "different" individual who does not fit into the predominant socio-cultural representation of beauty.

IV. Conclusions

Many women's difficulties with body acceptance are linked to a socio-cultural image of what an ideal feminine shape should be. The ability to normalise being thin and slender as societal standards of beauty and femininity to be normalised is mainly established by the media, which determines such socio-cultural norms (Binnie, 2004). Such normalisation of feminine beauty through media, as Levi-Strauss (1958) notes, has developed cultural and gender markers socially accepted as social truths. Media devices use to convey notions about 'body image' in a way that suits markets' financial aims. This, in turn, reproduces body image as a fundamental organising characteristic of women's understandings of their identities.

This essay discussed that the representation of female bodies is entrenched in the media's power to construct female thinness and their related discourses. By exploring the embedded socio-cultural representation of femininity, female bodies become the means by which a patriarchal order is reinforced in society. Accordingly, pressured to conform to the idealised norm of beauty, women are reduced to their sexualised bodies and become passive individuals or docile members of society. This study aimed to demonstrate the effect of the media in promoting female thinness and associated discourses on the topic of female body representation cultivates a patriarchal structure in society. The latter feeds capitalist markets by pushing women to work as clients to meet the idealised standard of feminine beauty. While women's identities are sexualized, feminist and counter-public critiques of such socio-cultural representations still remain far from deconstructing what has been recognised as the feminine regime of truth, and this study aims to build on such counter-public criticism.

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