

BEAUTY MYTH AND ITS EFFECTS SEEN IN THE MISS CONGENIALITY (2000) MOVIE

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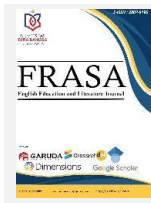
Abstract

This study examines the beauty myths depicted by female characters in the film Miss Congeniality (2000), including Gracie, Cheryl, Leslie, and Mary. The film follows Gracie, a female FBI agent who goes undercover as a beauty pageant entrant, compelling her and other participants to adhere to societal beauty standards perpetuated by beauty myths. The purpose of this study is to establish areas affected by the beauty myth and how it affects the main character. This study employed a qualitative methodology. This study applied Naomi Wolf's Beauty Myth theory. The scripts for Miss Congeniality (2000) served as the primary data for this study. Secondary data for this study included books, articles, journals, and e-books. The data-gathering processes included watching the movie, reading the movie script, identifying the data, classifying the data, and reducing the data. Based on this analysis, the study identified two main findings. First, the beauty myth affected four of the six areas examined: culture, hunger, violence, and sex. Second, the beauty myth caused two effects: dissatisfied and suffering. Gracie feels dissatisfied and suffering with her physical appearance as a result of this.

Keywords: *beauty standard, beauty myth, effects of beauty myth, Miss Congeniality*

INTRODUCTION

In many facets of life, literature shapes our perspectives. Literature is the imaginative work that pictures the human life in society which can be enjoyed, understandable, and used by the society also (Moputi & Husain, 2019). Literature frequently reflects and critiques cultural norms, especially those pertaining to race, gender, class, and other subjects. Literature is rich in discussion on gender issues. Gender is an integral part of human civilization, shaping people's lives both consciously and unconsciously. Gender is a dynamic social construct that is ever changing, a social category created by society (Helgeson & Helgeson, 2016). Some concerns will come up when talking about gender. For instance, sexism, violence, discrimination, stereotypes, and the concept of beauty.



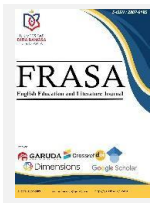
People's standards for physical appearance have always been based on their conception of beauty. Over the age, people of each culture have always had a definite notion of beauty which defines standards of body dimensions, skin colour and condition, hairstyle, or even how someone's facial features should look like (Sihombing et al., 2022). Every country in the world has unique beauty standards. Beauty standards refer to the specific physical attributes or traits that are considered desirable in each culture or society, such as clear skin, a slim figure, or symmetrical facial features (Kaur et al., 2023). This is influenced by a variety of factors, such as beliefs, culture, and how people define the term beautiful (Nagara & Nurhajati, 2022). Beauty standards have become a benchmark for judging the appearance of others. Every woman has the right to feel beautiful just the way she is. As a result, this situation arises from a sense of unacceptance that society imposes only one standard of beauty.

The impression of the universal ideal beauty standard, which most people believe from generation to generation, has resulted in a beauty myth. Beauty myth theory by Naomi Wolf is the centre of the discussion in this study. According to Wolf, beauty myth is an obsession with physical perfection that traps modern women in a continuous loop of hope, self-consciousness, and self-hatred as they seek to achieve society's unachievable expectation of the flawless beauty (2002). Naomi Wolf separated beauty myth into six areas: violence, sex, hunger, work, culture, and religion. These areas about beauty have an impact on women's lives and contribute to gender inequity.

The first area affected by the beauty myth is work. Women's performance and growth in the workplace are seen as a battlefield where their appearance and adherence to beauty standards play a major role. In addition to detracting from a woman's skills and credentials, this pressure to meet beauty standards perpetuates gender inequity by placing more value on looks than intelligence. The job market refined the beauty myth as a way to legitimize employment discrimination against women (Wolf, 2002).

The second area affected by the beauty myth is culture. According to Wolf, the stereotype of beauty, which becomes standard in society on physical appearance, body, faces, hair, clothes, becomes essential things (Wolf, 2002). Through the constant presentation of an idealized version of beauty as the standard, culture creates unachievable and unreasonable standards, therefore perpetuating beauty myths. The beauty standard in society herds people, particularly women, because the qualities of beauty are impressive, implying that women must seem beautiful at all times (Sayekti & Fitria, 2023). They should aim to have those long legs, that perfect skin, beautiful hair, and incredible body to become a real woman (Emeksiz, 2021). The idea that a woman's value is determined by her physical appearance is supported by the standard in the media and popular culture.

The third area affected by the beauty myth is religion. The rites of the medieval Church are thought to be founded on a doctrine as tangible as the Vatican's Rock: that beauty exists, that it is sacred, and that women ought to strive for it (Wolf, 2002). In religion, a person's beauty reflects their caste structure.



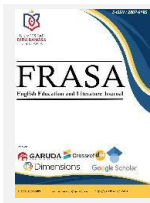
Sex is the fourth area where the beauty myth affects women, making them feel insecure in social and intimate interactions. In general, women are not seen as competent people but rather as objects of male desire. In fact, the beauty myth hit women simultaneously with—and in backlash against—the second wave and its sexual revolution, to affect a widespread suppression of women's true sexuality (Wolf, 2002)

Hunger is the fifth area affected by the beauty myth, and Wolf states that the cultural preoccupation with female thinness is more about female obedience than beauty (2002). Hunger is considered a victory for women in the pursuit of beauty. The beauty myth promotes the notion that thinness equals beauty and worth, resulting in an unhealthy ideal that many women strive to reach.

The last area affected by the beauty myth is violence. Women are willing to go through difficult things to fulfil beauty standards. The beauty myth reinforces the detrimental belief that women must satisfy certain appearance standards to be accepted or appreciated. For as far back as women could remember, something had hurt about being female (Wolf, 2002).

When people are subjected to beauty myths, they may experience a range of effects. According to Naomi Wolf, the beauty myth as a feminization tool makes them feel unsatisfied with their body, feel afraid that they cannot satisfy the men, even hate themselves (2002). The beauty myth has manipulated women into feeling insecure and unhappy with themselves, especially related with physical appearance. The second effect is suffering, where if someone hears statements about their appearance that do not fulfil the beauty myth, they will suffer because it is against their morals. Young women today feel vulnerable to judgment; if a harsh sentence is passed (or even suspected or projected), it is not her reputation that suffers so much as the stability of her moral universe (Wolf, 2002). Wolf also stated that young women who grew up with such violent imagery—are made to fear and distrust their own beauty and feel ambivalent about physically expressing (2002). The beauty myth also causes women to lose confidence because they believe they do not fulfil beauty standards. The beauty myth generates low self-esteem for women and high profits for corporations as a result (Wolf, 2002).

The issue of beauty myth is represented in *Miss Congeniality* which is a film that was released in 2000 and directed by Donald Petrie. The film tells the story of Gracie, an FBI agent who tries to go undercover in an American beauty pageant after hearing about a bomb terror at the competition. The study of the beauty myth in literary works is still not commonly practiced. Beauty myths criticize patriarchal beauty standards and emphasize that women must achieve specific standards, particularly those related to physique, in order to be accepted in society. *Miss Congeniality* is a relevant film to assess utilizing beauty myth theory. Beauty myths are reflected in the *Miss Congeniality* movie in a variety of ways, including Gracie's transforming appearance and the contrast between Gracie's appearance and the other participants. The film, through the character of Gracie Hart, emphasizes how beauty standards may constrain women and how women are frequently judged based on



their appearance. Therefore, this study will use the film *Miss Congeniality* (2000) to highlight the areas affected by the beauty myth and its effects.

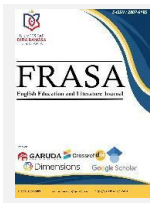
Multiple thesis that shares similarities with the one on "Miss Congeniality (2000) have been found in previous studies. One example is the thesis entitled *The "Representation of Beauty Myth in Nzingha Stewart Movie "Tall Girl""* written by Anggun Meidiawati published on 2023 which focuses on a the types of beauty myth. There is also thesis entitled *"Woman Representation in Donald Petrie' Miss Congeniality and McG's Charlie's Angels"* written by Refagita Friskova Mairanda and published in 2018 which focuses on the female characters. From this data, it can be seen that *Miss Congeniality (2000)* is an interesting literary work to be used as the object of this study. This study takes a different theoretical approach compared to the previously mentioned studies.

METHOD

This research used qualitative research to analyse non-numerical data such as text to gain a better understanding of social or human problems using Naomi Wolf's beauty myth theory. Qualitative research is a method for investigating and comprehending the meanings that individuals or groups assign to a social or human issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Women are frequently viewed based solely on their appearance, rather than their intelligence or quality. Researchers ensure the urgency of their research by gathering as much evidence as possible on beauty myths. *Miss Congeniality (2000)* is the object of the study. The data collection technique used by researchers is watching the movie, reading the movie script, identifying the data, classifying the data, dan reducing the data. There are two kinds of data, namely primary data taken from *Miss Congeniality (2000)* movie script by Donald Petrie and secondary data taken from books, articles, journals, and e-books that can provide information on the topics discussed. This study analysed areas affected by the beauty myth and its effects that were analysed using the theory of beauty myth by Naomi Wolf. The analysis was done by watching the movie repeatedly and reading the movie script in detail to get the data to be analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Naomi Wolf explains that there are six areas affected by beauty myth, work, culture, religion, sex, hunger, and violence. The female characters such as Gracie, Cheryl, Leslie, and Mary have experienced four out of six areas. There are culture, hunger, violence, and sex. According to Naomi Wolf, when beauty myths surround people, they may experience a range of effects, including unsatisfied with their physical appearance, suffer, distrust of their own beauty, loss of confidence, and addiction to pain. The main character, Gracie, endures two effects of the beauty myth: unsatisfied and suffer.



A. Areas Affected by Beauty Myth

Naomi Wolf stated that there are six areas affected by the beauty myth. The female characters in *Miss Congeniality* (2000) such as Gracie, Cheryl, Leslie, and Mary, have experienced four of the six areas, which are culture, hunger, violence, and sex.

Culture

Culture reinforces beauty myths by continually presenting an idealized vision of beauty as the norm, resulting in false standards that are inherently unreachable. The stereotype of beauty, which becomes standard in society on physical appearance, body, faces, hair, clothes, becomes essential things (Wolf, 2002). Physical appearance is a key component of beauty standards. As evidenced by the dialogue below, a culture that values appearance:

Gracie: "Mr. Meiling. How are you?"

Victor: "If you're Gracie Hart, I quit here right now."

Gracie: **"I'm having a bad hair day. Bad hair decade really."**

Eric: "Mr. Melling, I'm Eric Matthews. We spoke on the phone."

Victor: "Your hair is perfect. However, I can't accept this job. There's no way I can make this woman ready in two days." (*Miss Congeniality* 00:25:30-00:25:50).

Victor Melling, a pageant consultant, was startled that Gracie's appearance was so different from what he imagined. Gracie did not look like a typical pageant participant. Victor was also eager to state that he would leave if the woman in front of him were Gracie. Gracie's look, particularly her hair, was awful. Hair represents a cultural beauty stereotype. According to Naomi Wolf's beauty myth theory, Gracie's messy hair implies that she does not match beauty standards.

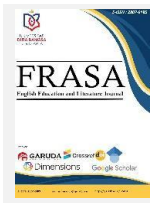
Other culture areas affected by beauty myth are shown in the dialogue below:

Victor: "Look how she walks. She's floating. Lightly ascending from cloud to cloud...towards heaven."

Gracie: "He takes one look at that fake rack. He's gonna send her right back. **Look, she's gonna cry again. "If I only have brain!"**"

Victor: "I am somewhat less than amused." (*Miss Congeniality* 00:30:40-00:31:04).

Despite their regular problems, Victor continues to assist Gracie in becoming her beauty consultant. Victor tries to show Gracie how to walk through a video. The video portrays a woman who has won a beauty contest. The woman is seen delivering a speech while crying. Gracie, mockingly, adds, **"If I only have brain,"** to the woman. Based on Naomi Wolf's beauty myth theory, culture stereotypes women to fit the myth by flattening the feminine into beauty-without-intelligence or intelligence-without-beauty; women are



allowed a mind or a body but not both (Wolf, 2002). This means that there is a preconception that a beautiful woman who has won a beauty pageant must be unintelligent. On the other side, a woman who isn't beautiful must be intelligent. Women cannot have both a body and a brain simultaneously.

Hunger

Hunger causes women to be concerned with a slim physical appearance and the diet culture. Fat is portrayed in the literature of the myth as expendable female filth; virtually cancerous matter, an inert or treacherous infiltration into the body of nauseating bulk waste (Wolf, 2002). Hunger area can be seen in the dialogue below:

Cheryl: "Hi, I hope I'm not disturbing you."

Gracie: "Oh, no, I was just, you know...grooming."

Cheryl enters — timidly, as she does everything else.

Cheryl: "I made some of my famous hot chocolate."

Gracie: "Oh...um... my roommate's asleep, or she is starting to mold. But do you want to come in?"

They sit down as Cheryl starts pouring it out.

Cheryl: **"I asked some of the girls...but when they heard "chocolate" they slammed their doors. They didn't give me a chance to say "non-fat"."** (*Miss Congeniality* 00:43:25-00:44:05).

Cheryl understands that she and the other contestants are still in the contest. Cheryl also understands that she and the other contestants need to keep their bodies ideal. Hence, she brought non-fat hot chocolate. However, the other contestants rejected it before Cheryl informed them that the hot chocolate she made was with no fat. Fat is a terrible waste that the body cannot absorb. In terms of hunger, women avoid fat. The contestants aim to maintain their ideal physical appearance throughout the competition, and hot chocolate is a high-sugar drink that should be avoided.

Another hunger area can be seen from the dialogue below:

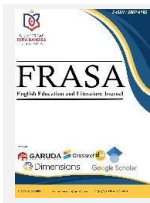
Gracie: "Come and have a midnight snack with me and some...girl talk."

Leslie: **"Are you crazy? We cannot have pizza and beer."**

Mary: **"Do you know how many calories you are talking about?"**

Gracie: "It's light beer and she is gonna throw it up anyway." (*Miss Congeniality* 01:07:31-01:07:39).

During this dialogue, Leslie and Mary are shocked by Gracie's behaviour. Leslie and Mary are used to participating in pageants and living up to society's standards, such as maintaining an ideal body. Gracie offers pizza and beer while the other contestants work out in the middle of the night. Of course, they rejected it because pizza and beer contain a lot of



calories. Despite their hunger, they refused to eat because they knew it would damage their flawless bodies the following day. According to Naomi Wolf's beauty myth theory, hunger drives women's obsession with thin bodies and diet culture. Female characters, such as Leslie and Mary, will take care of their bodies by avoiding fat-producing meals.

Violence

Women are willing to go through painful things to meet beauty standards. According to Wolf, many women took on this new version of pain exacted by beauty stoically because freedom from sexual pain left a gap in female identity (2002). As a result, the pain associated with cosmetic treatments acts as a societal motivator for women to sustain the beauty myth. The dialogue below highlights areas of violence:

Gracie: "Sweeney Todd what are you doing?"

Victor: "Your hair should make a statement."

Gracie: **"As long as it's not "Thank you very much for the Country Music Award" AWW!"**

Victor's Team: **"You'll be lucky if I can get it untangled."**

Gracie: **"AWW AWW!! EYY."**

Victor: "No mercy."

Victor's Team: **"Can I borrow that drill?"** (*Miss Congeniality* 00:32:09-00:32:20).

Victor and his team are seen prepping Gracie for a beauty pageant to make her look like an ideal woman. Victor advises his team not to feel sorry for Gracie because of her hair. Victor's team had to get a drill to detangle Gracie's hair. Despite the pain, this was done to ensure that Gracie met beauty standards. Gracie's struggle with her unruly hair is considered violence because, according to Naomi Wolf, women are willing to endure pain in order to be beautiful.

Sex

Women are frequently viewed as objects of male desire, rather as capable people. The myth wants to discourage women from seeing themselves unequivocally as sexually beautiful (Wolf, 2002). Sex in beauty myths makes women feel insecure in personal and societal contexts. The sex area is shown in the dialogue below.

The FBI agents are monitoring Gracie's activities using the hidden cameras that are set up. They are in the next room.

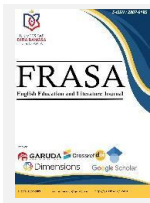
Agent Clonsky: **"Whoa guys. Hart in the dressing room. Come on!"**

Agent Harris: **"You see the legs on that girl?"**

Agent Clonsky: **"Who's your daddy?"**

Victor brought a silicone pad bra to wear to Gracie.

Gracie: "Those better be candy dishes."



Victor: "Turn around. Open."

Agent Clonsky: "This guy's like an inch from death. But a way to go."

Eric: "Break it up. Nothing to see."

Agent Clonsky: "What do you mean?"

Eric: "She's a federal agent." (*Miss Congeniality* 01:01:36-01:02:32).

Throughout this dialogue, FBI agents are keeping their eye on Gracie in another room. Gracie enters the dressing room wearing a bikini for the upcoming event. When Gracie wears this bikini, the FBI agents, all of whom are men, cannot quit staring at her on their computer screens. They also make statements on Gracie's body, like **"You see the legs on that girl?"** Their actions and words indicate a sex area here, as women are typically considered to be male objects rather than capable people, according to Naomi Wolf. Gracie is no longer seen as an FBI agent on the job, but as an object of pleasure for a male gaze.

B. The Effects of Beauty Myths

In *Miss Congeniality* (2000) movie, there are two effects experienced by Gracie as the main character, including unsatisfied and suffer.

Dissatisfaction

Beauty myth as a feminization tool makes them feel unsatisfied with their body, feel afraid that they cannot satisfy the men, even hate themselves (10). Women who do not conform to society's beauty standards, influenced by beauty myths, may be unsatisfied with their bodies and struggle to accept themselves. The dialogue below demonstrates this.

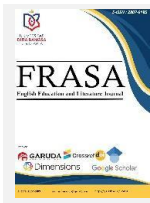
Gracie: **"I've never been in a beauty pageant. I don't even own a dress. I don't even own a brush."**

Eric: "Which part of that is supposed to shock me?"

Gracie: "Let's suspend reality for a second and pretend I said yes. I got to do everything? Like the whole big hair and the makeup and..."

Eric: "Damn right." (*Miss Congeniality* 00:21:09-00:21:38).

Gracie was suddenly chosen to be a beauty pageant. Initially, Gracie refused to enter the beauty pageant because she was dissatisfied with her appearance, which was far from the ideal woman. The FBI agents chose Gracie because they had no other choice. Gracie has no prior experience competing in a beauty competition. This made Gracie insecure about entering the pageant because Gracie did not even have a brush or a dress. Gracie also got into a fight with Victor because she wanted to refuse to enter the pageant, being dissatisfied of her appearance. According to Naomi Wolf's beauty myth theory, Gracie's action of feeling unsatisfied with herself arises from the beauty myth.



Suffering

Young women today feel vulnerable to judgment; if a harsh sentence is passed (or even suspected or projected), it is not her reputation that suffers so much as the stability of her moral universe (Wolf, 2002). If someone hears comments about their appearance that do not meet the beauty standard, they will suffer since it violates their principles. Suffer can be found in the dialog below.

Eric: "What do you mean?"

Gracie: "**I mean, you got the wrong girl.**"

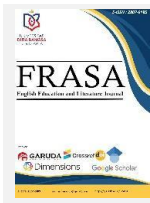
Eric: "All right?"

Gracie: "**I do not need this show. That's what I'm saying. I'm totally screwing up in there! I don't feel like a real agent anymore. I mean Vic says this thing that's so...I don't care what he said, you know? I don't care. Because I am the job...and I'm okay with that.**" (*Miss Congeniality* 00:59:37-00:59:58).

Victor not only helped Gracie change her appearance, but he also proceeded to coach her on how to walk and answer questions during the next day's interview. However, Gracie felt Victor's comments about her appearance made her feel unworthy for the beauty pageant. Gracie believed she had done her best but still fell short in Victor's eyes. Gracie is an undercover FBI agent, but Victor still wants her to win the pageant. This makes Gracie suffer, and she informs Eric. Gracie wanted to retire from the beauty pageant after Victor's comments about her appearance made her suffering. According to Naomi Wolf's beauty myth theory, Gracie suffers because she believes she is no longer an agent, but rather a beauty contestant who must win.

CONCLUSION

The beauty myth affects four out of six areas in the movie *Miss Congeniality* (2000) movie: culture, hunger, violence, and sex. In culture, appearance is the standard for beauty. Women in culture cannot be beautiful and intelligent at the same time. Women in hunger have an obsession with thin bodies and diet culture. Women in violence tolerate pain in order to satisfy beauty ideals. Women in sex are seen as male objects. In addition to the areas affected by the beauty myth, this study discovered the effects of these areas as perceived by Gracie. The movie *Miss Congeniality* (2000) depicts beauty myths and their effects. The first effect is unsatisfied, where Gracie is displeased with herself since she does not meet the beauty standard. The second effect is suffer, which happens when Victor's constant criticism of Gracie's appearance which falls short of beauty standards causes her to feel as though she is losing her identity.



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