

Tribhuvan University

Critique of Patriarchal Discourse on Beauty Myth: A Study of Roxane Gay's *Hunger*

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English**

By

Lata Chataut

Roll No: 14

Symbol No: 280357

T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-0282-0027-2013

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

March 2020

Tribhuvan University

Central Department of English

Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled "Critique of Patriarchal Discourse on Beauty Myth: A Study of Roxane Gay's *Hunger*" Submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Lata Chataut has been approved by the undersigned member of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the kind support of many individuals. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all of them. First and foremost, My deep gratitude goes to my supervisor, Assist. Professor Badri Prasad Acharya, who expertly guided me throughout the research. I want to take this opportunity to thank him for his untiring and unconditional efforts in providing research materials, his valuable time, patience and motivation.

My appreciation also extends to Head of English Department Prof. Dr. Anirudra Thapa for providing this opportunity. I am also indebted to Assist. Professor Pradip Raj Giri for his mentoring, encouragement and early insights that helped a lot to launch the greater part of this thesis.

I would like to thank my family, friends and the entire English Department for being kind and supportive whenever I needed some help. My appreciation to everyone who has willingly helped me out with their best of abilities to make this thesis successful.

Thank you.

March 2020

Lata Chataut

Critique of Patriarchal Discourse on Beauty Myth: A Study of Roxane Gay's *Hunger*

Abstract

This research paper analyzes Roxane Gay's Hunger as a feminist text that critiques patriarchal discourse on beauty myth. It shows how women have been evaluated by men since ages on the basis of their physical appearances. The life experiences of Gay in Hunger expose the way women are looked upon and judged just like that because of their bodies. The research paper reveals the way over-sized women are stigmatized in the name of socialization and rigid beauty standards under patriarchal discourses. The paper shows how beauty myths are created against women through their stereotypical images created by men, ignoring the inner beauty, skills, competence and other abilities in order to control and restrict them. It presents the idea that women become the victim of low self-esteem, self-hatred, and depression because of the compulsion to appear attractive and pleasing to men. It further clarifies that Gay gains excessive weight to resist the patriarchal discourse on beauty myth as it considers fat body of a woman unattractive. She believes that slender body type is desirable to men. Gay knows that women are expected to look attractive and pleasant for men. So, she deliberately becomes fat by eating uncontrollably and begins to dress like men to destabilize the patriarchal discourse on females. Theoretical concepts from revisionist feminists such as Elaine Showalter, Helene Cixous, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Naomi Wolf are used to prove the major argument of this thesis.

Keywords: beauty myth; fat woman; patriarchal discourse; stigmatization; critique; revisionist feminism; representation

Introduction

This thesis shows that Roxane Gay in *Hunger* critiques beauty myth by challenging the patriarchal discourses on images of women. It presents that a female body has to undergo rigid forms of social control and response against woman's appearance in the public spheres dominated by patriarchal mindset. I limit my study to the body image, the discursive nature of peculiar treatments towards fat women and the stigmatization of obese females in the society. This paper discloses that socialization stigmatizes women, which leads to the emergence of self-hatred, low self-esteem and depression because of the constant pressure of staying 'beautiful'. Furthermore, this thesis reflects upon the images of women in the society on the basis of their looks and it goes along with the ideas of theorists and creative writers who have been trying to rewrite the definition of beauty in terms of not only outer appearance but also inner beauty and attributes.

In contemporary time, most of the people aspire to have an attractive body. They invest a lot of time, money and effort so that they can achieve the 'ideal' body type. We can especially see these ideal-looking females everywhere be it in the film, advertisements, music videos, women's magazines and so on. Not only limiting the appearance of slender body to the glamour industry, but the very ideals of women to appear slim, fit, white, and attractive are promoted even by the socio-cultural values. The pressure of looking beautiful and attractive is always on females while males are excused for inappropriate dressings, misbehavior and being controlling. Be it in terms of body-type or looks, men are privileged with options unlike women. The socialization process has also impacted upon women as they want to look attractive in order to fit into the category of the 'beautiful.' It pressurizes them and leads to severe disorders such as eating disorders, body dysmorphic disorders, dissatisfaction in females regarding their own bodies which can be vividly seen in Gay's *Hunger*.

Roxane Gay (October 15, 1974) is an American writer, professor and an editor.

She is the author of *Bad Feminist* (2014) which was published in *The New York Times* best-selling essay collection. Another popular novel by her is *An Untamed State* (2014). It explores multiple themes such as race, sexual violence, family, and the experiences that immigrants face in a foreign country. She is also known for her short story collection *Difficult Women* (2017), and the memoir *Hunger* (2017). Gay writes her work basing on her personal experiences with race, gender identity, sexuality as well as physical appearance which tend to analyze and deconstruct feminist and racial issues and its psycho-social impact in the lives of women. Being a feminist, she believes that the existing definition of beauty is rigid rather there should be a broader definition of beauty which includes diverse body types.

The primary text of this thesis, *Hunger* is a memoir about eating disorder, weight gain and self-image. It presents the first hand experiences of the author being gang raped by her boyfriend and his friends when she was twelve. Initially as a twelve years old child, she believed that her slender body became the reason for her suffering. Growing up inculcating the same patriarchal values led her to believe that women should not occupy much space in the society in a sense that they should always be in proper sizes. She understood that fat body was undesirable to men. She believed that her slender body gave the boys the urge to gain pleasure from her because of her attractive body. In her memoir, she confesses that she was confident at the age of twelve when she was raped.

After that incident, she wanted to be physically large by deliberately eating more so that she can make herself repulsive to men. She was raped and she could not resist it, that is why she started eating uncontrollably and made her slender and 'perfect' body fat and therefore 'unattractive.' She blamed her slender body for being an object of beauty and therefore becoming the subject of voyeuristic gaze of those boys. It began to suppress her and she began to eat massively to make her body ugly

and her confidence started turning into low self-esteem.

Gay talks about her experiences of her guilt and shame of looking at her own reflection in the mirror. She also talks how her ex- boyfriend was fond of the white blond thin girls from the women's magazines. Since she was slender but black, her boyfriend never really liked her. Rather he pretended to like her just to try things out. After all that happened, she began to feel lonely and scared to be half as vibrant as she used to be. It impacted her personal, familial, and social life. She went through the psychological upheaval. She used to be respectful, studious, and hardworking but never forgot the importance of her heritage as she always was a good Haitian daughter. Even after being raped she blamed herself for everything that happened to her. She wanted to run away from place to place not settling at one particular location because she did not want to get noticed. She did not want to pretend that nothing happened to her and that she was fine.

In the boarding school she went, she alienated herself from the rest. Because of the access to abundant food and also she shared a different background than her other classmates, food became her ultimate best friend there. She shares her experience of being traumatized and more than that how the society stigmatized women who are fat and black are not beautiful rather abnormal and unfit. She began to eat recklessly. She got gallstone because of her unhealthy eating habit and she went through a lot of physical problems as her body was transforming towards the unhealthy side. She writes about her experience of being enrolled in fitness camp to be 'normal' or 'beautiful' and to tackle the difficulties that her fat body was causing. The more weight she gained, the more she felt detached from her body. She was treated like an ugly woman because she was fat and black. She was sympathized but not loved. She was treated as if she was ill and unhappy because of her giant body.

Initially she believed everything she learned about the rigid standards of beauty in the society she grew up in. She started writing about the things that bothered her. She wrote mostly about women and their pain because writing was the only medium that could possibly help her feel better.

On her first day of teaching at Michigan Technological University in the Upper Peninsula, she threw up because she was terrified. She thought her students would make fun of her, mock her weight as she herself was very negative about her own body size. She wanted to be admired or at least be treated like an ordinary woman. She also talks about people's assumed narratives regarding the fat or colored people. For instance, her landlord told her that she did not sound like a colored girl on the phone. This incident made her realize the myth regarding black people or less attractive people that they are judged on everything which may not be true. No matter what you do, the body becomes the subject of public discourse with family, friends or even random strangers.

Gay presents the data about epidemic costs of obesity is between \$147 to \$210 billion a year. She discloses the encouragement of self-loathing by the media especially by the women's network if you are not thin enough. They influence women in many ways that even women do not feel good about their existing body type or shape. They have always equated thinness with self-worth and indirectly have conveyed the message that fat people are less capable of doing things compared to the thin ones. They try to convey the message to their audience that if you are not thin enough, you are not good enough. They pressurize women to change their appearance according to societal will, that is why women starve themselves because of the pressure to meet the standards of beautiful, attractive, worthy, and pleasing as labeled by the society. But when Gay got disillusioned from the social construction of the

labels of beauty, she considered all those as myths. She began to dismantle the outer and the very shallow definition or concept of being called beautiful. In the memoir when she learned about the beauty myth she admired what is inside the body. She values intellect and what is inside the body rather than how a body looks from outside. Not only her body but her skin color also troubled her feminine traits for other people. But nothing bothered her like before as she started raising voice against the rigid definition of a beautiful woman. Her obesity was a threat to her as a woman and her black skin as a writer; she found her voice despite the myths created against her and for many women who can relate to her journey from self-loathing to self-acceptance and self-admiration.

The memoir talks about how plus size people are treated in the society, how they feel about their fat bodies and how they are made feel amongst the people especially for being a fat woman unlike the way they are supposed to be. *Hunger* is not about the hunger for food rather hunger for feeling secure, hunger for getting even treatment by the people and hunger for feeling normal of all. Gay was obsessed by the idea of having a fat body as a safe-guard for her since she considered her slender body responsible for being raped and how unattractive and worthless fat people feel and made feel about themselves. However, the traumatic experience of being gang raped is not the primary concern of this research.

Regarding body shaming or the stigma of body, many scholars and critics have reflected upon the same issues in *Hunger*. Talking on *Hunger*, Katy Waldman opines “Gay, who at one point weighed 577 pounds, speaks of her flesh as “layers of protection I built around myself” likening her frame to a “fortress” or “cage.” (+1) Gay deliberately gains weight because it makes her feel safe. She describes her layers of fat skin as layers of protection that will protect her from any potential threat. For

her, the outer appearance, that is her fat body works like a shield that has the ability to keep her safe, unlike the experience of being harmed physically and emotionally when she was slim.

In the same way, Carina Chocano reviews Gay's *Hunger* from feminist perspective. She talks about how society makes women hate themselves if they do not meet the criteria set by the society for them. Chocano tries to show how women hold themselves responsible for anything bad that happens to them even if it has nothing to do with them in most of the cases. She argues:

Woven into this story of trauma is a thread of astute criticism that lays bare the problematic assumptions, the endless hypocrisies of a culture that is toxic to women, that instructs us to hate ourselves. Much of it centers on the idea of hunger, both as emotional need and as motivating desire. As a young girl Gay was overwhelmed with shame. As an adult she understands that she was victimized, but the shame remains, reinforced by the stories the culture tells about it. (1+)

The shame of having a fat body remains with Gay even after she realized that being raped is not her fault but an unfortunate incident that she became a victim to. Her body was not a reason for whatsoever but she blamed herself for being raped because the patriarchal notion regarding women's beauty lies in slender body and Gay is aware of that very well. Being raised in the same society she knows that her fat body is not something to be praised.

A woman is supposed to stay fit, beautiful and desirable all the time. The hypocritical roles assigned to women include being attractive and desirable for men, otherwise she is mocked at and shamed for not falling into the category. The trauma that she experienced because of her body haunts her whenever she starts losing

weight. She wants to lose weight not only because of her physical problems and her desire for achieving a slender and attractive body but also because of the sympathy and pity people show to her as if she is 'abnormal.' She could not come out of the trauma of being gang raped completely but the intensity of the impact of the same incident in her life keeps on fluctuating.

Similarly, Nicole Tone indicates that it is not only having a traumatic experience resulted from being gang raped but how she is a victim of stereotyping through discourses created regarding the association of slender bodies as happy and fat bodies as unhappy. Talking about the discourses made regarding the treatment of a female body she adds:

But it's not just the sexual trauma that Gay works through in her memoir. Her weight gain, her classification as morbidly obese is traumatic in and of itself due to the way society treats someone of her size. . .how 'healthy' and 'happy' are linked in society's preconceived notions of these ideas and how they apply specifically to women. (1+)

The notion of happiness is totally guided by personal choices. But if we talk about women, they cannot choose things for them freely. They are imposed upon certain dos and don'ts by the society they live in. Fat people, in particular, are restricted by lots of conditions by medical communities and even by the family and friends. Being fat is a matter of their choice and they should not be judged for the life they live.

The above mentioned reviews either talk about the sufferings of the author because of her being an obese or they have analyzed the text from the lens of trauma theory. Making a point of departure from these perspectives, my main concern is to show how the text critiques existing discourse of Beauty Myth about women through the perspective of Feminism. The primary concern of this research is to show the

domination of women based on their physical appearance and how such women are affected by that biased behavior. The research explores how a fat body is stigmatized in the society, focusing on the patriarchal construction of beauty standards. She tries to reveal the unrealistic and generalized beauty standards as an unhealthy form of social control by presenting the stereotypical images as myths created for such physically unattractive women. The issues regarding domination of women and the repercussions that result henceforth are addressed by feminism; that establishes not only socio-political rights to women but also the issues of their bodies, their fragile images as women in the society as well.

Feminism is a school of thought that emerged during late eighteenth century that aims to define, establish, and achieve the social, political, economic equality for both women and men. Societies have always favored men and dominated women; therefore, feminist movement came into action to fight the gender stereotypes and to guarantee the equal opportunities and positions to women. Likewise, Feminism attempts to redefine patriarchal definitions regarding women. It is divided into three waves as First wave, Second wave and Third wave. The term "first wave" was coined in March 1968 by Martha Lear which dealt with the legal issues including enfranchisement of women. The Second wave incorporates the reevaluation of women's role in the society such as increasing access to abortion, birth control and so on and it was pioneered by Simone de Beauvoir during the 1940s. In the same way, Third wave feminism during the 1960s and onwards, continues the legacy of the former wave and also goes beyond to contain broader issues like racism, individualism, diversity, multiplicity and so on. Following the footprints of Third wave feminism and beyond, the research draws theoretical insights primarily from the Revisionist feminists especially Elaine Showalter, Helene Cixous, Sandra Gilbert and

Susan Gubar to support the research claim. The research makes the use of certain concepts developed by these feminists such as Elaine Showalter's "Gynocriticism" from *A Literature of Their Own*, Helene Cixous's advocacy on women's need to write to revisit or re-write patriarchal myth from "The Laugh of the Medusa" and Gilbert and Gubar's "anxiety of authorship" from *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

Before Eighteenth century women wrote only about sentimental issues. They did not write about the serious issues that needed to be thought or pondered upon intellectually rather they wrote about their personal experiences and day to day happenings. But the literature of women marked a turning point with the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft in which she argues that women are not naturally inferior to men rather appear to be inferior because they lack education. It was highly influenced by the Enlightenment idea which was written with the objective of giving women the ability to reason. Women were taken as fundamentally different beings and they were taught only in ways that pleased men. They were not given access to public spheres rather they used to be involved in their private affairs all the time. Their thoughts were not taken as significant or pertinent and their potentials were denied in the society. But Wollstonecraft, through her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, conveys that women should read and write about more serious issues, extending their domain from private to public, sentimental to intellectual. Traditionally, the myths regarding men and women are quite stereotypical. Men are supposed to be rational. They should possess the ability to reason or act rationally. Women, on the flip side, are not expected to be intellectual or rational rather they are looked as emotional, submissive and demure. The images of women were divided into two extremes; either as angel or as demon or witch. If they follow the patriarchal norms and values without

questioning back they were treated as good women, if not they were given the tag of bad women. They were expected to have good look and do whatever they are told to do.

Women's confinement in the home and as a result their inability to participate in the public sphere results in their insipidness and pettiness. Wollstonecraft wanted to inspire women to go beyond the boundaries and restrictions and get educated so that they could set themselves free from the domination and be independent. The activist movements of feminism guaranteed the legal and political rights to women and attempted to give women the equality to men in every aspect possible during the 1960s and the 1970s. These movements assured that women would no longer have to be dominated or suppressed under the rigid social norms rather they would be given access to everything that men were privileged with.

The revisionist feminists such as Showalter, Gilbert, Gubar and Cixous show their accordance with the fact that women will be treated well after the activist movements but they were much concerned about the images of women that were written or presented earlier in the myths. They were not convinced about letting the misbehavior and ill treatment of women go just like that. They decided 'to write' in order 'to right' the earlier misconceptions or myths regarding the images of women. Not only limiting to the freedom to their legal and political rights, they were equally concerned with portraying the previously negated myths regarding them in a positive light.

As the primary text *Hunger* imbeds multiple issues such as race, gender, body shaming and identity within it, revisionist feminism is highly applicable to analyze these issues as it aims at making the wrongs right by writing about it. Gay goes through lots of unfortunate incidents because of her skin and she describes how she is

looked at differently than other women as if something is wrong with her. This very memoir relies heavily on the descriptions the author shares regarding her body and people's perception towards an obese woman.

The research work has been divided into three major sections as introduction, textual analysis and finally findings and conclusion. The researcher begins the thesis by introducing the issue of her research along with its context. The introduction section includes the introduction of the research topic, introduction of the primary text as well as the author. It also includes literature reviews, thesis statement as well as the introduction to the theoretical tools followed by the applicability of the text. In the second section which is the textual analysis, I have taken insights from different theories and concepts and analyze the primary text in relation to the theories and concepts used earlier, developing the major argument. Finally, the researcher presents the findings and conclusion of the entire research paper. In the earlier myths only the external beauty was prioritized. Beauty was talked in relation to racial, gender and cultural features of a person. The images of women were presented into two extremes, either as a demon or as an angel. Women were stereotyped on the basis of certain traits. They used to be looked at, judged only on the basis of their physical appearances. Their skills, intellect, behavior and potentiality were never foregrounded.

Over the course of time, beauty ideals that represent social views towards women have undergone drastic changes. Women with fair skin were idealized and used to justify the unfair treatment of dark-skinned women, who were segregated. In the early 1900s, the ideal female body was represented by a pale complexion and small waist. Similarly, in the 1920, women with a thinner frame and small bust were seen as beautiful. Meanwhile, the ideal body type of full-chested, hourglass figures

were idealized in the early 1950s.

An article "The Ideal Female Archetype" published in *Hajinsky* magazine; mentions women are idealized based on their physical appearances. In contemporary times, if we search for "beautiful women" on the internet, it shows us the pictures of slim, white women with a narrow nose, pouty lips and golden wavy hair. Even though society is continuously shifting the socially constructed ideals of beauty imposed on women, such women are idealized by the society as they appear in every advertisement, social media and so on (+1). It also shows the narrow image of the west regarding the feminine beauty which compresses women to a singular idea of what it means to be attractive or beautiful. Even though it is very pervasive on its own, it is internalized as the definitive beauty marker by the aspirers that keep the door open to compare and contrast the meeting of those beauty standards by others.

Roxane Gay also inculcates the same norms and values of what bodily features should one have to call them beautiful. She also believes that her slender body attracted the boys towards her and that is why she was raped. She internalizes that if she was not attractive in all sorts she would not have been raped as she was a colored woman already. She internalizes the same culture of the American society where they admire slender body types. She thinks that she could have protected herself from the voyeuristic gazes if she had made herself against how society wants the women to be. She is guided by the western concept of beauty that is why she deliberately started to make herself appear in an unattractive way in order to distance herself from being an object of desire for men.

Beauty myth is male-oriented. It is the patriarchal norms and values that label the beauty standards for men as well as women. Men used to dominate women in both private and public spheres thereby dividing them into two extreme categories as devil

or angel. The myths were created against women highly based on their physical appearance only. If a woman looks good, she is considered good in many terms and if she looks unattractive and cannot be pleasurable to men, she is not a proper woman as such. Men have represented women as biased and stereotypical discourses about women in the mainstream culture.

Talking on the very narrow definition of beauty, Susan Sontag, an American writer and political activist shows her accordance with the revisionist feminism that asserts on existence of multiple layers of beauty. She criticizes the way women used to be looked at, judged on the basis of their physical appearance; thereby back grounding their skills, intellect and competence. In "An argument about beauty" she argues that beauty does not reside on physical space but on spiritual and intellectual space. She sees beauty as the amalgamation of both outer and inner attributes and critiquing the mainstream culture that divides women into different categories she argues:

The perennial tendency to make of beauty itself a binary concept, to split it up into 'inner' and 'outer,' 'higher' and 'lower' beauty, is the usual way that judgments of the beautiful are colonized by moral judgments. From a Nietzschean (or Wildean) point of view, this may be improper, but it seems to me unavoidable. And the wisdom that becomes available over a deep, lifelong engagement with the aesthetic cannot, I venture to say, be duplicated by any other kind of seriousness. Indeed, the various definitions of beauty come at least as close to a plausible characterization of virtue, and of a fuller humanity, as the attempts to define goodness as such. (212)

Sontag advocates for the 'inward beauty' which is considered to be more important than 'outward beauty' especially for women. Our society always teaches women to be

fair and beautiful. So, most women think that their only aim and responsibility is to be beautiful. Such a concept has not only degraded women's dignity but has also made them inferior to what they are and dependent to males. The writer is telling the beautiful women to think over the triviality of outer looks. They discredit women's potential, their intelligence and professionalism. Their beauty should be used as a source of power to do something but not to attract men. They should be competent, independent, and thoughtful in order to revive the ideal value of beauty and preserve their identity in the society. The essence of being a good human does not reside on being good looking but it also has to do largely with one's virtues.

Gay in her memoir counters the existing notion of beauty and says it is rigid on its own; that makes women to succumb to the norms of society. She shows the problem with the social convention regarding women's body in particular; that women should not be judged particularly for their outward features rather the inner attributes should also be comprised to make a woman complete as a human being. Countering the rigid beauty standards created for women she argues:

Regardless of what you do, your body is the subject of public discourse with family, friends, and strangers alike. Your body is subject to commentary when you gain weight, lose weight, or maintain your unacceptable weight. People are quick to offer you statistics and information about the dangers of obesity, as if you are not only fat but also incredibly stupid, unaware, delusional about the realities of your body and a world that is vigorously inhospitable to that body. This commentary is often couched as concern, as people only having your best interests at heart. They forget that you are a person. You are your body, nothing more, and your body should damn well become less. (31)

The preoccupation regarding plus size people are portrayed as lazy, careless and over

eating habits in the mainstream writings but it is even worse when it comes to a woman. She emphasizes on the idea that women are presented in ways that show them as inferior and dependent upon men. More than talking about the vices and virtues of a woman as a human being, the concern is given to how she looks outwardly. She says that people judge a oversized woman as someone who is lazy, undisciplined and one who eats uncontrollably. They see her virtues as insignificant and all they care about is how a woman make herself appear in front of society. If a woman fails to meet the beauty standard of that particular society, she is considered less worthy and she is dominated as a woman and being fat makes it worse to cope up.

Women are allowed to write about their experiences but limiting themselves to sentimental issues. They are not allowed to transcend the private spheres when it comes to expressing themselves and their works were not even published since they were considered insignificant for the mass. Elaine Showalter in her *A Literature of Their Own* unabashedly writes about the urgency for women to write about themselves in order to convert themselves into the subject from the object of men. She attempts to redefine the physical beauty labeled upon women underestimating the inner goods, skills and capabilities that they hold. In the same book she argues:

The Victorians expected women's novels to reflect the feminine values they exalted, although obviously the woman novelist herself had outgrown the constraining feminine role. "Come what will," Charlotte Bronte wrote to Lewes, "I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on these terms, or with such ideas, that I ever took pen in hand." (7)

The male writers or the society under patriarchal norms allowed women to write but they were not given the freedom to express themselves well. They were expected to

write about their feminine attributes such as their emotionality, submissiveness, dependency, physical beauty and so on. They were supposed to write showcasing what is charming in women to men or what men would want to see in a woman. But women writers had already outgrown the constraints that bound them ever since. George Henry Lewes, the spokesman for women's rights and Victorian liberalism talked about how women were overshadowed by male cultural imperialism and they would have literature of their own if they had a different place from men and only if they had not read any writing of men, women might have a literature of their own. Responding to him, Charlotte Bronte says that she cannot write limiting herself to the charming elements of femininity rather she transcends the constraints and is critical about the earlier stereotypes and images that women were categorized into, in order to rectify the wrongs of mainstream writing dominated by male writers while portraying women into stereotypes.

In *Hunger* also, readers can notice the very private incidents that most of the women do not dare to write about like Gay does. Mostly the adventures and struggles of writers are kept in front of the readers unlike her. She raises issues that are not easy to read. She writes about how she feels in her body rather than what people expect her to write as she writes:

Writing this book is a confession. These are the ugliest, weakest, barest parts of me. This is my truth. This is a memoir of (my) body because, more often than not, stories of bodies like mine are ignored or dismissed or derided.

People see bodies like mine and make their assumptions. They think they know the why of my body. They do not. This is not a story of triumph, but this is a story that demands to be told and deserves to be heard. (2)

Gay also inculcates the patriarchal values in her as it impossible to escape the norms

and values of the society we live in. She hesitates to expose her bodily experiences at first but gradually she collects enough courage and expresses her experience of having an obese body. Society does not want to hear such stories as they are ignored and are considered insignificant. However, Gay celebrates her body the way it is and says that it should be heard and known by everyone about how fat bodies are mistreated and ignored from the mainstream content. Hence, she shows the uniqueness of each body and insists every woman to accept herself.

Regarding the same, Showalter writes about how sharing the bodily changes and experiences of women were taken as a taboo and how society taught women to keep all their physical experiences to themselves. She says:

While it was theoretically possible for women novelists to write about female physical experience, including childbirth and maternal psychology, they faced many obstacles to self-expression in their own sphere. Victorian women were taught to keep these experiences to themselves, to record them in very private diaries or to share them in intimate friendships with one or two other women.

There were strong taboos against sharing them with men. (81)

Being a feminist critic and gynocritic, Showalter criticizes the mainstream literature where the stereotypical images of women are made and disseminated. She tries to study women's literary history and personal experiences in general. Since the mainstream culture is very prescriptive, she demands for a different subculture in women's writing. Women were not allowed to write about their natural conditions like menstruation and pregnancy and they were taught to hide it and were encouraged to feel shame about their bodies and bodily changes they experience.

Roxane Gay in her memoir *Hunger* presents the constraints upon women as she is the part of the society that teaches her to stigmatize her body and feel ashamed

about it. *Hunger* imbeds diverse subject matters incorporated in a culture which cannot be seen in isolation and being ashamed of one's appearance is one of them. It aims to present the fact that there is no universal definition of beauty and what needs to be called beautiful or not is a matter of a social construct after experiencing the unfortunate incidents in her life. She expresses:

I don't know how things got so out of control. . . Some boys had destroyed me, and I barely survived it. I knew I wouldn't be able to endure another such violation, and so I ate because I thought that if my body became repulsive, I could keep men away. Even at that young age, I understood that to be fat was to be undesirable to men. . . This is what most girls are taught— And most women know this, that we are supposed to disappear, but it's something that needs to be said, loudly, over and over again, so that we can resist surrendering to what is expected of us. (4)

Like most of the women, Gay is also taught to stay beautiful by the society. The socialization process encourages women to be attractive, coquettish and appear pleasing to men. She is taught to receive admiration regarding her looks and be happy and content with that. The inner beauty and skills of women are given less attention as compared to men. There is not any mandatory code for men to act, behave, talk and dress as such whether in private or public spaces unlike women who have limitations in both spheres. Even at the very young age of 12, Gay had in her mind that being fat means being undesirable to men. She realized that being fat means being unattractive and if she becomes fat she could keep men away from her. She felt that she got raped because she was sexually appealing to men as she had a slender body. She inculcated the same norms and values taught by the male oriented ideologies regarding the dos and don'ts for women. They are expected to take less space be it physical or

intellectual. She felt ashamed and intimidated as she took more space physically.

Beauty myth is discursive in its very nature. There is not an absolute definition of beauty as such. Beauty is always geography and culture specific. The European standards of beauty may not be applicable to the standards of beauty in Asia, Africa or any other part of the world. Anything to be called beautiful is always under the influence of that particular place and culture and the power structure of that society. The people in power, mostly men, create certain discourses regarding the looks or appearance of women. Women have been dominated by men since ages and the rules and regulations made for women are very biased and restrictive. Those biases and dominations affect them socially as well as psychologically which end up creating a negative view towards self and make it difficult for them to present themselves in the public sphere. It also creates fear, anxiety and hence isolates them from the social connections and involvement. Women were dominated by men not only in the social spheres run by the male-dominated society but they were only inevitably trapped in the literary constructs of the same society. In the literary works also, the coercion can be seen upon the females as they were defined by male writers in their writings with their implication of the women's actions.

Gay in her memoir *Hunger*, shares her experiences as she also becomes the victim of social norms and values regarding the appearance of woman. She expresses her anxieties, insecurities and low self-esteem that resulted from being a plus size woman. She shares her experiences of being sympathized just because she was overweight. People used to see her and talk to her as if she is a victim of some disease that has stopped people from seeing her potential and capabilities.

The discussion about how socialization stigmatizes women and impacts them psycho-socially is very effectively presented by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar

in their *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). In "The Queen's Looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity " from *The Madwoman in the Attic*, they write about the psycho-social impacts of male's domination upon females be it in life or literary writings. Gilbert and Gubar also inspect the Victorian literature from a feminist perspective in which they address the affects that women faced or the victimization of women resulted by the social domination by saying:

Before the woman writer can journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy, however, she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, with, that is, those mythic masks male artists . . . Specifically, as we will try to show here, a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" which male authors have generated for her. And similarly, all women writers must kill the angel's necessary opposite and double, the "monster" in the house, whose Medusa-face also kills female creativity. (17)

Women were divided into two extremes: angels or devils. If women do what is prescribed to them without questioning back, they were considered as good women and if they do not follow the instructions given to them by the men no matter how restrictive and prescriptive the instructions are, they were considered as bad or mad women. The society judged women and labeled them on the basis of their behavior towards men and their domination. They could not go against the society, nor could they object to it. They were treated like an object of men thereby making them too vulnerable to even say no to things that tortured them; both physically and mentally.

Patriarchy promotes good looks and attractive women. She writes about her ex- boyfriend being fond of white and slender therefore 'sexy' women, saying:

We would hang out in his bedroom and flip through worn copies of his older brother's Playboy and Hustler magazines. I studied these naked women, mostly young white blond thin taut. Their bodies seemed alien, unreal. . . He clearly found these women exciting, sexually attractive, and I knew, even then, that I was nothing like them. . . He never did, and in his way, he punished me for what I wasn't and couldn't be. He punished me for being too young and too naïve, too adoring and too accommodating. I was a thing to him, even before he and his friends raped me. He wanted to try things and I was extraordinarily pliable. I didn't know how to say no. It never crossed my mind to say no . . . A girl like me, pliable and sheltered and unworthy and desperately craving his attention, did not dare hope for anything more. I knew that. (13)

She was taught and made feel that having white skin, slender body and wavy hair were the beauty markers. She was a woman of color but she had a slender body. She was treated like an object by her boyfriend for whom she was nothing but just a thing to explore sexual things with. Even though she knew that she was being used and she did not actually like it, she could not refuse it. At that young age also, she readily accepted the fact that being a black woman, she was not attractive and desirable to men, influenced by the myths or stereotypes regarding the appearance of women. Not only she let her boyfriend take the wrong advantages of her insecurities and low esteem but also she could not raise a voice against the wrongs that happened to her because somehow she held herself responsible for having a slender body and feminine attributes, which broke her emotionally.

Gay also talks about her awareness to resist the unrealistic social standards that teach women about being self-disciplined regarding their bodies. She writes that

she does not hate her body because it does not meet the rigid beauty standards but she is not comfortable in her own body physically. Being a feminist, she could resist the social rigidity regarding beauty by growing larger and larger but it was her own body that was creating problems to her and making her uncomfortable, that is why she tries to lose weight. Similarly, *The Madwoman in the Attic* suggests that women themselves are capable enough to create themselves as the characters and to reach out to other women for help who, like them, are trapped in the inescapable web of patriarchal mindset. They dared to defy the conventions also in writing. Female writers should not only step out of the images of mad/bad or good women but also they should be creative in their own writing, stepping out the rubrics generated by the male writers already. Women writers should not rely on the patriarchal language and style of writings rather they should write depending solely upon their own experiences, refuting the stereotypes made against them in the earlier writings by the male writers.

Roxane Gay exposes the imperfections and insecurities in the culture, even in feminism and her own insecurities, low self-esteem and anxieties while writing the very memoir *Hunger*. She confesses in the very beginning in her memoir that she dares an attempt to decline society's judgment of overweight people. Gay reveals the bitter truth that the stories of obese people are usually ignored or dismissed. She takes the risk to open up because she wants to have her position in the society as an important individual and writer. She says, "People see bodies like mine and make assumptions. They think they know the why of my body. They do not. . .this is a book about disappearing and being lost and wanting so much, wanting to be seen and understood. . ." (2) Whoever talks about or writes about some oversized people, they assume that they became fat by eating uncontrollably and being lazy. They do not

bother to know the actuality of why those people are obese but the readers consider them by generalizing the possibilities anyway.

"Anxiety of authorship" can be noticed while going through the memoir of Gay. In simple terms, "anxiety of authorship" can be understood as the anxiety and pressure that the female authors feel regarding the criticism she would receive from the male readers or the patriarchal oppressors. Women writers of the nineteenth century felt that they do not have any footsteps to follow which makes it difficult for them to write about their feelings genuinely. Had there been any foundation established before, they would have followed it, which would have made things easier for them to write unabashedly about patriarchal domination. Talking about "anxiety of authorship", Gilbert and Gubar in "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship" from *The Madwoman in the Attic* write:

Not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority, they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of her self—that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity. On the one hand, therefore, the woman writer's male precursors symbolize authority; on the other hand, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity as a writer. . . . Thus the "anxiety of influence" that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary "anxiety of authorship"—a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a "precursor" the act of writing will isolate or destroy her. (48-49)

Female writers were not only anxious about the unhealthy criticism from male readers, but also were looking for female readers who could understand and relate to

their experiences. All the inferiorities that female writers came across reflect their struggle and dedication to define themselves as writers who does not follow the thread mainstream writing that were solely about adventure and travelling experiences. These female writers chose to write something different that was not explored before. The experience of women's bodies was not given any significant space in the dominant culture. These writers dared to write about their bodily experiences and also did an attempt to create their images in a positive light unlike their male counterparts defined them in the mainstream writing.

Gay writes admitting the vulnerability of being uncomfortable in one's own body. Also, she writes by forming her own conception and experiences of obesity, being hopeful about it. She also tries to convince the readers both males and females about how challenging it was to write the very memoir as she says:

I wish, so very much, that I could write a book about triumphant weight loss and how I learned how to live more effectively with my demons. . . I have written this book, which has been the most difficult writing experience of my life, one far more challenging than I could have ever imagined. And what could be easier to write about than the body I have lived in for more than forty years? But I soon realized I was not only writing a memoir of my body; I was forcing myself to look at what my body has endured, the weight I gained, and how hard it has been to both live with and lose that weight. I've been forced to look at my guiltiest secrets. I've cut myself wide open. I am exposed. That is not comfortable. That is not easy. (2)

She clearly mentions her anxiety that she undergoes as a person and as an author while writing the memoir about her body. She knows that the readers want to read a triumphant story or journey of her regarding the weight loss. However, she shares that

it is not her successful weight loss journey rather a true story of her that includes many heartbreaking incidents and her unruly body, eating disorder, low self-esteem and what not. It was not easy at all for her, to present herself as an open book and let everyone see inside her. The disclosure of all the excruciatingly painful incidents that were caused to her by others and by herself was very difficult to let out of her memories as she forces herself to look back into all the terrible things that happened to her, all over again.

Gay tries to make her readers understand that the assumptions that were made earlier about fat people may not be reliable. Every individual is different; everyone has a different body type and reaction to things they eat. Besides food, there may be other medical conditions, psychological breakdowns that compel a person to let things fall apart in his/her life. The images made earlier regarding fat bodies are imprinted in the public's mind and they tend to generalize whenever they see a fat person. They give a disgusted look to that person and make them feel guilty for not being 'normal' like other people. The anxiety she feels for exposing herself totally by revealing all her secrets to correct the impression made by the patriarchal writing about bodies like her is clearly visible in the text.

Gay is a rape victim but more than that she is a victim of her oversized body. She does not feel fully comfortable in her skin because of various problems her body causes to her. However, she is unexplainably bothered by the reactions people give to her just because of her body. She gets to hear very rude and cruel comments that are passed to her as judgments or suggestions. She points out that no matter how good a person is and how well he/she behaves, at the end of the day he/she is still judged by the appearance. She explains that she does not want to leave her home until she has to do it at anyhow.

Regarding the fears, anxiety and phobias, Gilbert and Gubar talk about how those fears are responsible for making women come across because of the social domination. They talk about the deep impact that social biases leave upon women. Women suffer from the psycho-social problems such as claustrophobia, anorexia, agoraphobia and so on.

In an article "An Overview of Claustrophobia (Fear of Enclosed Spaces)," Lisa Fritscher explains Claustrophobia as "a fear of enclosed spaces. Like any phobia, the severity of claustrophobia can vary widely from person to person. You may experience symptoms in small rooms, crawl spaces, crowds, and many other situations. Some people who are claustrophobic are uncomfortable in elevators, public restrooms etc." (+1) When someone is claustrophobic they get anxious and they get panic attacks in narrow places and also get suffocated in crowded places. Likewise, James McIntosh in his article "What you need to know about agoraphobia" defines agoraphobia as "an anxiety disorder that manifests as a fear of situations where escape could be difficult, or in which help would not be available if something bad were to happen." (+1) Agoraphobics basically feel uncomfortable when they go out in open spaces. They find it difficult to be in the crowd or to communicate with many people and they do not feel like leaving from their house alone as they have the constant fear or awkwardness to get trapped in public which they often avoid. Talking about the similar fears in females and its manifestation in their writings, Gilbert and Gubar write:

As we shall see, therefore, infection continually breeds in the sentences of women whose writing obsessively enacts this drama of enclosure and escape. Specifically, what we have called the distinctively female diseases of anorexia and agoraphobia are closely associated with this dramatic/thematic pattern. .

.through the suicidal self-starvation of anorexia . . . More obviously, agoraphobia and its complementary opposite, claustrophobia, are by definition associated with the spatial imagery through which these poets and novelists express their feelings of social confinement and their yearning for spiritual escape. (85-86)

The domination of male writers regarding the representation of women can be seen in the mainstream literature. The language itself is patriarchal and conventional which made women undergo the inevitable struggles including the female writings. Gilbert and Gubar attempt to disclose the psycho-social impacts upon women because of the social conventions. The negative views towards women made them even vulnerable in a sense that they tend to take shelter in a confined space whether it be physical, psychological or social. They did that out of humiliation, low self-esteem, and negative portrayal of them in the public sphere and so on.

The traces of such fears or phobias of avoiding public spheres and choosing private space can be seen in *Hunger* as Gay voices:

And so I am terrified of other people. I hear the rude comments whispered. I see the stares and laughs and snickering . . . The list of bullshit I deal with, by virtue of my body, is long and boring, and I am, frankly, bored with it. This is the world we live in. Looks matter, and we can say, “But but but. . .” But no. Looks matter. Bodies matter. If I don’t have to teach or travel for work, I spend most of my time talking myself out of leaving my house. I can order something in. I can make do with what I have. Tomorrow . . . There are several tomorrows when I can lie to myself, when I can hope to build stronger defenses for facing the world that so cruelly faces me. (50)

The stereotypes regarding plus size people are portrayed as lazy, careless and over

eating habits in the mainstream writings but it is even worse when it comes to a woman. The myths regarding the good looks of a woman are valued and promoted even by the socio-cultural norms and patriarchal values imprinted in everyone's mind. Being an obese, she feels bored, disgusted and sad by getting the constant comments that people pass on her on a daily basis only on her body, which has made her inferior and ashamed and that is why she avoids socialization and imprisons herself alone as much as she can.

A woman should write to reclaim her voice and to rectify the image that has been wronged in the myths created by male writers in their writings. *In Hunger*, Gay writes that there is a need to write because by writing, not only a woman gives justice to herself but she also contributes to fair treatment to all the women who were suppressed, dominated and stereotyped by men. She emphasizes on the idea that women are presented in ways that show them as inferior and dependent upon men. More than virtues, the vices of women are shown in the male-dominated discourses.

Helene Cixous also advocates the idea that women need to write in her essay "Laugh of the Medusa." She intends that even women have internalized the male ideologies to their own detriment. She asserts that there is a close relationship between women's bodies and their writing. Both the bodies and writings of women are suppressed by men for ages. Cixous emphasizes on the idea that women should begin to write in order to reclaim their bodies, images and voices and set forth the idea as:

I write this as a woman, toward women. When I say "woman," I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history. But first it must be said that in spite of the enormity of the repression

that has kept them in the "dark"-that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute-there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. (876)

The above extract clarifies the idea that Cixous is advocating heavily on women's need to write for themselves. The male ideologies have suppressed women physically, socially and also in the writing by making women internalize those values of male dominated society. The mainstream literature has portrayed women in different ways. Women cannot even relate to the images created for them by the male writers. They should also celebrate their bodies and embrace themselves as they are. In order to bring forward the reality and the real experiences, there is an urgent need for women to write.

Gay, in *Hunger* shares her need to write talking about the need to debunk the stereotypes created against women by the patriarchal society. She shares her experiences of being treated impolitely and unruly because of her big size. For the society, she is not beautiful enough to meet the standards of beauty labeled by it as she is an obese and also a colored woman. She validates the rigid conventions and stereotypes created against women as she always has to face challenges that are beyond physical appearance, regarding which she writes:

My fat body empowers people to erase my gender. I am a woman, but they do not see me as a woman. I am often mistaken for a man. I am called "Sir," because people look at the bulk of me and ignore my face, my styled hair, my very ample breasts and other curves. It bothers me to have my gender erased, to be unseen in plain sight. I am a woman. I am large, but I am a woman. I deserve to be seen as such. We have such narrow ideas about femininity.

When you are very tall and wide and, well, I guess the tattoos don't help, you

too often present as “not woman.” Race plays a part in this too. Black women are rarely allowed their femininity. (75)

Gay exposes the bitter truth of society that sees and wants to see women as attractive, pleasing to men, especially fair complexion and with a slender body. The beauty standards are very much rigid no matter how modern people have become. Gay used to dress up like man because she felt safe in those clothes. Since she was giant, she was often ignored by the people. She is not even looked at as a woman because people assume that someone that big cannot be a woman. People just glance at her image and assume her for being a man and address her by saying 'sir' without thinking enough about her sex and without thinking about her feelings and sentiments for wrongly addressing her as a man and not even feeling sorry about it.

Debunking the stereotypes of women, Gay writes about her experiences of how she was treated. She dares to write back to prove that she, as a woman, has to fight against the mainstream writing and raise voice for herself and for other women under male domination. She advocates that women regardless of their body types should be respected and they should be confident and happy in their skin.

Myth is also the false story created by the people in power. Males created the beauty standards as well as certain dos and don'ts for females that they were bound to follow. But through their writing they can right the wrong representation of themselves and bring forward their subjective experiences and celebrate the differences regarding their bodies, similar to which Naomi Wolf exposes today's unrealistic standards of female beauty as a destructive form of social control in her book *Beauty Myth*. She discusses the process in which a woman links her identity to her physical appearance. Women all over the world feel the constant pressure to appear young and beautiful. She is troubled by the social control upon women which

is very restrictive and prescriptive in nature. Despite the power, position and legal recognition, modern women are controlled just like in the traditional women who were kept in control in the name of staying attractive and desirable. In the struggle for women's equality, women's compulsive pursuit of beauty is still challenging every woman on a daily basis.

Wolf exposes the domination of beauty myth existing from ages and its oppression on women even today at family, work place and media by saying:

The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us . . . During the past decade, women breached the power structure; meanwhile, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing medical specialty . . . and thirty-three thousand American women told researchers that they would rather lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal. More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers. Recent research consistently shows that inside the majority of the West's controlled, attractive, successful working women . . . it is a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control. (10)

The more freedom women achieve, the more they are bound to fit in the cruel images of female beauty. Back in time women fought for their freedom from male domination and for their legal and political rights.

Through various women's movements, they achieved everything they wanted in the legal and intellectual domain. They got power, position, money and recognition.

But when it came to treating themselves physically, they failed to see themselves as beautiful in the way they looked. They began to treat their bodies cruelly in order to meet the images created by beauty myth regarding a female body everywhere in media, literature and in socio-cultural domain. In terms of legal considerations women got freedom but they got trapped in the obsession to appear beautiful at any cost. They did not take their bodies and appearance as they are naturally rather they underwent surgeries and also starved themselves for the sake of meeting the myths regarding female beauty. The beauty myths not only deteriorate them physically but emotionally and socially as well. Beauty myths are created to control women; infused in the name of beauty. The media, the workplace and even the society promote women to look beautiful, attractive and pleasing to the beholders and if they fail to do so they are not given preferences, which is also responsible for the emergence of self-hatred, low self-esteem, depression etc. in them. Wolf describes this phenomenon as the mechanics of patriarchy to keep women controlled by diverting them from the practical problems.

Likewise, Gay also talks about how the myths are created against women to keep them in control by the mainstream culture. She sheds light on the role of the media in promoting the unrealistic beauty standards about females. She reveals the unruly treatment given to fat people by the medical communities as well as the people who visit them were shamed because of their weight and they were made to push their limits in inhuman ways as they vomit, sweat and become weak by starving themselves to get rid of that shame. Talking about 'The Biggest Loser,' a television show about weight loss she expresses:

The Biggest Loser is a show about fat as an enemy that must be destroyed, a contagion that must be eradicated. This is a show about unruly bodies that

must be disciplined by any means necessary, so that through that discipline, the obese might become more acceptable members of society. They might find happiness, which can, according to the show, according to cultural norms, only be found through thinness. (34)

Wolf describes television shows like *The Biggest Loser* as anti-obesity propaganda that offer wishes to people of overweight bodies to lose weight. She believes that shows like this discourages obesity and explains it as a contagion that must be removed. Fat people must exercise the disciplines taught in the show. It describes obesity as an enemy and disseminates the message that being obese means being abnormal and also promotes the norms that fat people cannot be happy being fat.

Gay shows her disagreement when the media shows the linkage of happiness and acceptance with thin bodies is formed under the discursive regime by overstating good looks by the society by saying, "It is a powerful lie to equate thinness with self-worth. Clearly, this lie is damn convincing because the weight-loss industry thrives. Women continue to try to bend themselves to societal will. Women continue to hunger. And so do I" (36). Generally the myths regarding female beauty are limited to their physical appearance. Women are looked at and judged only on the basis of their physical beauty, ignoring their inner attributes, intellect, behavior and much more. As it is very difficult to disentangle from the myths women also believe that they should look good all anywhere they go. Gay also inculcates the same value as she also starves herself at times to transform herself according to the will of the society so that she gets to feel normal just like the thin people do.

Beauty myth is a discourse created by the people in power. It is created by a men's institution. It is the strategy of patriarchy to break the unity of women by dividing them on the basis of their bodily differences so that they cannot stand

together to fight against the male domination ever. If women come together ignoring all the differences, they can achieve anything they want through their unity but if they are divided they compare and contrast each other between themselves, diverting themselves, though unconsciously from the happenings outside. Wolf, on calling beauty myth as patriarchal, says:

If the beauty myth is not based on evolution, sex, gender, aesthetics, or God, on what is it based? It claims to be about intimacy and sex and life, a celebration of women. It is actually composed of emotional distance, politics, finance, and sexual repression. The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men's institutions and institutional power. The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance. Competition between women has been made part of the myth so that women will be divided from one another. (14)

Beauty myth claims that it is made for women to celebrate womanhood. It is understood that beauty myth is all about woman's intimacy, life, sex and everything related to women and it is solely related and limited to women only. Generally, men seem to be unaware about the things women do in the name of beauty and they have nothing to do with these things. But actually, women do all the things to meet the unrealistic standards of beauty myth created and imposed upon them by the men only. They need to look beautiful, appear younger than her age, sexually appealing, and desirable. Women think that it is her choice and being a woman and she has to look good. But ultimately it is men for whom she has to look good for. She does not realize that all the things she does in the name of femininity is actually prescribed by men. The rigid standards of beauty such as a woman should look good all the time, she should have an attractive body, she should be fair in complexion and so on are

actually the things that control and divide women.

Society encourages the idea that if a woman is not thin, she cannot be happy. But Gay points out the fact that a woman is forced to be unhappy when she does not meet the beauty standards set by the society for women. If a woman is fat, she is made embarrassed by the people around her and even the television shows are made to make them feel imperfect. Even if a woman does not want to lose weight for herself, society compels her to be in shape and she has to deal with the constant pressure to be beautiful so that she can be called an "ideal woman." which clearly shows male's prescription to females about how she should be rather than how she wants to be.

To conclude, this research resists the discourses of beauty myth created by the patriarchal society in Roxane Gay's *Hunger*. Gay destabilizes the concept of beauty myth. She discloses that beauty myth is a social construction that presents stereotypical images of women since ages, to repress them. She exposes that when women are categorized as attractive and unattractive according to the rigid standards of beauty, it leaves serious impacts upon women such as the emergence of low self-esteem, self-hatred, ill-treatment towards oneself, depression and so on. She rebels against the norms of society and she chooses not to be an object that is desirable or that pleases the men, as she wears men's clothes and avoids using feminine things such as pretty clothes and make up.

This research paper also shows that outer beauty or appearance is just a factor to describe a person but it is not an absolute identity marker. Gay focuses on the inner attributes, skills, behavior and competence to build her own identity as she inclines her position of a writer and her imaginative power more than her appearance. The way society treats women and the way it pressurizes women to appear in certain ways affect them both socially and psychologically. She asserts that women should not hate themselves for not meeting the criteria set by the society for them as those rigid standards are nothing but just the discourses of patriarchy created to control women in

certain ways.

Works Cited

- Chocano, Carina. "Roxane Gay on the Traumas of the Body." *The New York Times*, 14 July 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/14/books/review/hunger-a-memoir-of-my-body-roxane-gay.html>
- Félix, Doreen St. "Roxane Gay's Complicated Hunger." *The New Yorker*, 26 June 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/roxane-gays-complicated-hunger>
- Fritscher, Lisa. "An Overview of Claustrophobia (Fear of Enclosed Spaces)." *Very Well Mind*, January 25, 2020, <https://www.verywellmind.com/claustrophobia-2671681>
- Gay, Roxane. *Hunger*. Harper, 2017.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Yale University Press, 1984.
- Haas, Lidija. "Review of *Hunger* by Roxane Gay: How the World Treats Fat People." *The Guardian*, 19 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/19/hunger-by-roxane-gay-review>
- Hall, Stuart. "The Spectacle of the Other." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall. Sage, 1997, pp. 223-92.
- James, Caryn. "Critic's Notebook; Feminine Beauty as a Masculine Plot." *The New York Times*, 7 May, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/05/07/books/critic-s-notebook-feminine-beauty-as-a-masculine-plot.html>
- Jean, Susan E. "The Ideal Female Archetype." *Hajinsky Magazine*, 2019, <https://hajinsky.com/articles/the-ideal-female-archetype>
- Jonson, Richard, et al. *The Practice of Cultural Studies*. Sage, 2004.

- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Columbia University Press, 1982.
- McIntosh, James. "What you need to know about agoraphobia." *Medical News Today*, 20 Dec. 20, 2017, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/162169>
- Sontag, Susan. "An argument about beauty." *Daedalus*, vol. 134, no. 4, 2005, pp. 208-213. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20028023. Accessed 9 May 2020.
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own*. Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Tone, Nicole. "On Roxane Gay's *Hunger*: A Memoir of (My) Body." *The Coil Magazine*, 26 June, 2017, <https://medium.com/the-coil/book-review-roxane-gay-hunger-nicole-tone-2c2b91dd8ae2>
- Waldman, Katy. "Review of *Hunger* by Roxane Gay: Through the Act of Memoir, Attempts to Take Possession of Her Body." *Slate Magazine*, 26 June 2017, <https://slate.com/culture/2017/06/the-hunger-to-stop-hurting.html>
- Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth*. Chatto & Windus, 1990.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. 1792. Cambridge University Press, 2010.