

Tribhuvan University

Cinematic Representation of Body Shaming in Chbosky's *Wonder* and Katariya's

Dum Laga Ke Haisha

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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This thesis entitled “Cinematic Representation of Body Shaming in Chbosky’s *Wonder* and Katariya’s *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Sudeep Gartaula has been approved by the following members of the research committee.

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Abstract

Sharat Katariya's *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (2015) and Stephen Chbosky's *Wonder* (2017) examine the contradiction that arises when mainstream film frequently shapes society's fascination with beauty. Following Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry criticisms, this dissertation interrogates body shaming to argue that both films disrupt capitalist beauty norms, reframing heroism through non-ideal protagonists. While typical movies uphold generalization, fueling cruel abuse, harassment, and mockery, these films instead foster critical awareness, revealing how systemic marginalization persists within capitalist commodification. Applying textual interpretations, methods and techniques, I have examined and analyzed representative shots, scenes and sequences pertaining to body shaming in these films. My methodology combines critical theory with close examination of camera angles, character dynamics, and verbal and nonverbal clues in textual segments. Although my primary focus concentrates on the films discussed, I include a short observation about the body politics of the Nepali cinema industry. By centering self-acceptance over conformity, these films challenge filmmakers globally to abandon stereotypes. Their narratives urge Nepali creators to confront cultural roots of body shaming and create stories that celebrate diversity beyond physical appearance.

Keywords: body shaming, capitalist beauty norms, marginalization, nonverbal cues, camera angles, self-acceptance, physical appearance

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Chapter I

Introduction: The Concept of Body Shaming

Body shaming has grown into a widespread social issue that influences how people view both themselves and other people. The dynamics of body shaming unfold in the normal and abnormal both senses. In normal sense, films and shows practice it as if it would not affect anyone, so they take it as a part of humor and joke. Characters insult and have fun of the size, color and looks of bodies or body parts of each other. On the other hand, there are a few films that aware the audience that body shaming is a negative act because it is a process of discouragement by insulting, bullying and humiliating one according to his/her body structure. Ariane Resnick, in “The Impact of Body Shaming and How to Overcome It” writes that negative remarks regarding one’s own or another’s body constitute body shaming (1). The commentary can be about a person's size, age, hair, clothes, food, hair, or level of perceived attractiveness. In Resnick’s perception, body shaming is not only uttering negative about others’ bodies but also is a negative comment about his/her own body too.

There are two words in the phrase ‘body shaming’: body and shaming.

Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com defines ‘body shaming’ as “the practice of making negative comments about a person's body shape or size”. The definition highlights that body shaming actively criticizes someone's physical appearance by making disparaging comments about perceived defects. In her article on *HelpGuide.org*, Alice Schluger states that body shaming is mocking or criticizing someone’s body through harmful remarks targeting weight, shape or features, whether others perceive them as overweight or underweight (par. 1). According to Schluger, body shaming can happen in person or

online, and it can come from anyone, like family, friends, or even strangers. Even joking about what someone eats or how much they weigh can be body shaming. Sometimes, people unintentionally harm others by praising weight loss or offering diet advice, which inflicts lasting damage on self-esteem and mental health, far exceeding casual insults. Cyberbullying and body shaming on digital platforms are related, yet one can fight back against online body shames, overcome their hurtful words and devastation, and rebuild faith in oneself. Schluger connects body shaming to society's fixation on physical beauty, which the media intensifies by portraying "ideal" bodies, eroding self-esteem and fueling insecurity through unrealistic standards.

The form of human beings has been a subject of fascination and scrutiny throughout history, with societal expectations dictating what constitutes "beauty." However, both traditional and new media often perpetuate unrealistic and narrow beauty standards. Media, particularly films, play a crucial role in shaping societal perceptions of beauty and can inadvertently perpetuate body shaming through their portrayals. The authors of "Body Image and Beauty Standards: Role of Media in Shaping Perceptions" have discussed on conventional beauty standards for films. Films portray male heroes as powerful, protective, handsome and noble whereas they depict women as sensitive, emotional, weak and dependent on their partners. Those boys, who watch television more, think that men are superior to women (Lal et al. 51). Most of the cultural and religious beliefs also support it. From unrealistic beauty standards portrayed in advertisements and movies to casual body-shaming comments made in social interactions, individuals are attacked with messages that reinforce the idea that their bodies must conform to a specific ideal. The topic of this dissertation is particularly

significant in the context of cinema because films have a powerful influence on shaping cultural norms and values. The portrayal of body diversity and acceptance (or lack thereof) in films can have a profound impact on how audiences define their own bodies and the bodies of others. By critically examining the generality of body shaming in films, we can gather a better understanding of how media depicts this issue and find out potential strategies for promoting body positivity and inclusivity.

Types of Body Shaming

Body shaming can take different forms and frequently targets particular physical characteristics. It can vary significantly across cultures, geographies, genders and historical periods. Cultural norms, societal expectations, and beauty standards might differ among nations when it comes to body image. While some cultures value a smaller physique, others view a larger figure as a sign of riches and affluence. Body shaming has evolved with changes in social norms, fashion trends, and media representations. Body shaming may be more or less common depending on the socioeconomic situation, cultural norms, and availability of healthcare in a certain area or nation. Different writers have categorized body shaming differently, but the conclusion is almost same. Ariane Resnick has divided body shaming according to weight, body hair, attractiveness, food, clothing, age and hair. Expanding on these criteria, Resnick classifies body shaming into distinct categories—such as eating habits, attire, and aging—which reveal the broad spectrum of appearance- and lifestyle-based judgments people face.

Similarly, Jennifer Mattern, in “Body Shaming, Confidence, and Writing Careers” states body shaming can occur to individuals of all genders, ages, and backgrounds (par. 22). Mattern adds that it happens for various reasons such as weight, height, muscle mass,

disabilities, hair, and skin (23). After analysing the different writers and surfing around the web, I have concluded a few typical kinds of body shaming:

- **Fat Shaming:** Often fuelled by societal beauty standards, fat shaming is the act of disparaging, ridiculing, or treating someone unfairly because of their weight (Khanna par. 2). It shows itself as jokes, insults, and even institutionalized discrimination in the workplace and in healthcare.
- **Skinny Shaming:** In contrast to fat shaming, which targets those who are overweight, skinny shaming makes fun of or criticizes thin people. Thin shaming results from views of thinness as unhealthy or unsightly, whereas fat shaming is a result of praising thinness (Khanna 3). Both are detrimental, yet they have distinct effects on people.
- **Ableism:** Ableism is a discrimination of making disparaging comments or notions about individuals with disabilities (Resnick par. 1). People with disabilities may experience severe consequences from these negative actions, including low self-esteem, humiliation, and feelings of loneliness.
- **Ageism:** Age shaming makes fun of or treats someone unfairly because of their age, frequently forcing them to look younger. Mostly affecting older people, it devalues aging and promotes youth as desirable (Resnick 2). This prejudice can take the form of workplace discrimination or insults.
- **Racial Body Shaming:** Racial body shaming promotes negative preconceptions about body types or features by targeting people based on their race or ethnicity (*The Guardian*, par. 1). It damages self-esteem and

mental health and manifests as bullying, colourism, stereotyping, or cultural appropriation.

- **Colourism:** According to *World Economic Forum*, a type of discrimination known as colourism attacks people based on the colour of their skin, frequently favouring lighter skin tones over darker ones. This can take many different forms of discrimination (Bagalini par. 1). For people with darker skin tones, colourism can have a detrimental effect on their mental health, sense of self-worth, and general quality of life.
- **Facial Feature Shaming:** Iranian freelancing platform *Karlancer.com* states that a type of prejudicial views known as "facial feature shaming" attacks people because of the features on their faces, such as their lips, ears, nose, or eyes (Bagalini 2). Shaming someone for their facial features can seriously harm that person's self-worth, mental health, and general wellbeing.
- **Hair Shaming:** The discrimination known as "hair shaming" targets people because of their hair, as *Wikipedia* says, whether it is excessively thick, thin, wavy, straight or of different colour ("Discrimination based on hair texture"). This can take many different forms, including harassment, bias, and profiling. The psychological state, general well-being, and self-esteem of people can all suffer greatly from hair shaming.
- **Body Hair Shaming:** Body hair shaming is the practice of criticizing somebody for having too much or too little hair in accordance with standards of beauty. Men may be made fun of for having too much or no

hair, while women are under pressure to cut it off (Khanna par. 3). This disregards individual preference and cultural variety in favour of unattainable beauty standards.

- **Height Shaming:** According to *Wikipedia*, the term "height shaming" or "heightism" refers to insulting someone for their height—whether they are too small or too tall ("Height discrimination"). This type of body shaming can cause feelings of insecurity, self-consciousness, and social isolation, making it just as unfavourable as other forms.
- **Dental Shaming:** The authors of "Oral Health-Related Stigma: Describing and Defining a Ubiquitous Phenomenon" describe dental shaming as the process of mocking someone for their teeth, including issues like overcrowding, gaps, discoloration, or misalignment (Doughty, J., et al. 1). This can be particularly harmful, as dental problems can sometimes relate to childhood neglect or lack of access to dental care.
- **Speech Shaming:** Speech shaming, as *The Speech Bubble* describes, frequently targets regional speakers, non-native speakers, or those with disabilities, makes fun of or comments on someone's accent, tone, tempo, or word choice ("Speech Shaming"). It discourages self-expression and causes shame by reinforcing prejudices regarding status and intelligence.

Each of these forms of body shaming can have a significant negative impact on the individual's self-esteem, mental health, and overall well-being.

Overview of Primary Texts: *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*

This dissertation examines representation of body shaming in the capitalist world. It looks at how culture industry creates beauty standards that lead to body shaming and affect body perception. We can learn a great deal about the prevalence of body shaming in popular culture and its effects on people's lives by looking closely at these narratives. This study aims to analyse how the beauty industry, through advertising and product marketing, cultivates consumer insecurity and a culture of body shaming. It further explores the resistance movements and alternative beauty standards that challenge the dominant capitalist narrative. For this purpose, I have selected the films *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* to examine how culture industry has preserved conventional beauty standards, resulting in body shaming. My study analyses it by explaining the portrayal of body shaming in two films: Stephen Chbosky directed *Wonder* (2017), an American coming-of-age family drama, and Sharat Katariya directed *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (2015), a Hindi romantic comedy-drama released internationally as *My Big Fat Bride*. R. J. Palacio's 2012 novel of the same name forms the basis of the film *Wonder*, starring Julia Roberts, Owen Wilson, Jacob Tremblay, Mandy Patinkin, and Daveed Diggs.

In this film, close-up shots and reactions from characters depict societal pressures on individuals with physical differences, while in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, framing techniques and dialogues portray struggles with body image in the context of societal norms. In *Wonder*, Auggie Pullman, the protagonist, takes birth with facial differences that lead to bullying and social isolation. Auggie's experiences underscore the cruelty and emotional impact of body shaming, as he struggles to navigate a world that often values physical appearance over inner worth. Key scenes, such as the protagonist's first day of

school and his interactions with classmates, vividly depict the prejudice he faces and the toll it takes on his self-esteem.

On the other hand, *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* exposes the theme of body shaming through the character of Sandhya, a plus-sized woman who defies societal expectations of beauty. The main actors in this movie are Bhumi Pednekar, Ayushmann Khurrana, Seema Pahwa and Sanjay Mishra. The film challenges traditional notions of femininity and attractiveness, displaying the protagonist's flexibility and her quality to find love and acceptance despite facing discrimination. Key scenes, such as Sandhya's initial confrontation with her husband's family and her journey to participate in a running competition, highlight the societal pressures she faces and her determination to overcome them. I have chosen these films for this research because they skilfully illustrate the complex nature of body shaming, including its emotional, social, and psychological consequences.

Selected films *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* highlight body shaming as the central theme. Both films depict the pervasive societal pressures and stereotypes faced by individuals who deviate from conventional beauty standards. Makers released *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* within a short timeframe and they share a genre. These two films represent different cultural and narrative contexts, so I have paired these films for my dissertation to show how they explore body shaming as a prominent issue across societies, genders, and locations. The protagonists of *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* face bitter experiences of body shaming, struggle so hard and finally they win the society.

By analysing different scenes of these films, I have found how the makers have visualized body shaming in these films. By analysing the portrayal of body shaming in

the two films, this research paper holds significant implications for both academia and society, and contributes new insights to existing scholarship on media representation and body image. Innovatively, this research bridges the gap between cultures offering a comparative analysis of body shaming portrayals in different cultural contexts.

Considering the simple fact that I have chosen Hollywood and Bollywood movies as primary sources, I do not intend to explore the background, culture and history of these cinemas. My intention is not to evaluate Bollywood and Hollywood films, nor am I interested in the number of films that specific actors, filmmakers, or producers work on. I believe that popular films always cross the geographical, cultural and language borders with their universal qualities. Actually, as I have already shown, the lack of similar resources in Nepali cinema is the reason I chose these movies. Currently, there is a lack of Nepali films addressing this issue, and I hope to inspire the industry to produce more inclusive and empowering content.

By highlighting how capitalism influences beauty standards, I have shed light on the harmful effects of body shaming in our communities. Ultimately, my goal is to raise awareness and promote acceptance of diverse body types. Even though I have focused on English and Hindi films, I believe the issue I am discussing applies to Nepali films too, as it is a worldwide issue. I have chosen English and Hindi films as my primary texts because I noticed Nepali films lack this kind.

One of the objectives of my dissertation is to show in what way these films visualize body shaming. I have examined verbal cues related to body shaming in these two movies by looking at the words or dialogues spoken by characters. This includes paying attention to camera works, insults, jokes, or comments about character's body

size, shape, or appearance and nonverbal cues such as gesture, posture, space, body language, facial expression and so on. Similarly, the other objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate how culture industry through films, promotes conventional beauty standards, leading to body shaming within society. By analysing some scenes and sequences of these films, I have explored how culture industry has kept traditional ideas of beauty alive, which makes people feel bad about their bodies. This happens because society puts pressure on us to look a certain way. This analysis not only sheds light on the constructed nature of beauty standards but also paves the way for discussions about promoting body positivity and inclusivity in mainstream media.

The researcher has used a qualitative method in this dissertation to investigate how *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* portray body shaming, with an emphasis on how these movies address conventional beauty standards. This study examines how these films question dominant notions of beauty standards using a combination of visual and narrative analysis, guided by the concept of pseudo-individualization from Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the cultural business. By examining both verbal and non-verbal cues, camera work, symbols, and themes within these visual texts, the researcher seeks to improve knowledge of the cultural dynamics surrounding body image and self-perception, especially in Nepali society, where awareness of the negative impacts of body shaming is still lacking. The study aims to promote positive change in Nepali film industry and raise critical awareness of the societal ramifications of body shaming by pointing out the parallels and contrasts in how these films interact with hegemonic beauty ideals.

This dissertation examines body shaming in *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* films, focusing on societal frameworks and culture industry. It highlights how these films challenge traditional beauty norms and empower victims, while acknowledging a cultural shift towards deeper storytelling in Nepali cinema. It does not discuss the audience responses, production process and it excludes the number of films these directors, actors, and artists have made or acted.

Chapter II

Literary Landscape

Underlying Concepts

There is a wealth of literature and criticism exploring the concepts of body shaming, with a focus on their psychological and social impacts. However, a gap exists in research specifically analysing how films portray this concept. While numerous studies explore the representation of gender and race in cinema, a dedicated examination of how films like *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* depict beauty standards and their link to body shaming is scarce. This lack of in-depth film analysis on the topic presents a significant opportunity to investigate the ways capitalism might infiltrate films, subtly reinforcing narrow beauty ideals that perpetuate body shaming.

In Diksha Mittal's perception, globalization changed Indian beauty standards to conform to Western notions of thinness in the 1990s, which stigmatized fatness in Indian society (par. 5). Nepal and India have many cultural similarities, so Nepal has carried it too. The film depicts Sandhya, the main character in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (2015), as inferior due to her weight, which has an impact on her social and private lives. Mittal argues that globalization strengthened the notion that slim bodies signify self-control and respectability, while being overweight is associated with gluttony and indolence. This is a reflection of the demands placed on women in India and Nepal by society to adhere to limited notions of beauty, where one's physical image can affect one's social standing, professional opportunities, and interpersonal connections.

Leah Henzen argues in *Likeside Pshychology* that we should value abilities over appearances (par. 13). I have summed up her article in three major flaws: courage against

body shaming, harmful focus of society, and the call for change. We frequently feel that body shaming is acceptable since it can motivate people to reduce their weight and enhance their health and well-being. The author makes the case that society's obsession on looks is seriously wrong and causes a great deal of pain. They urge us to emphasize health and well-being over size and weight and to acknowledge the bravery required to challenge these damaging conventions.

According to *Time Entertainment*, Kate Winslet discussed in an interview with *Harper's Bazaar UK*, bullying she experienced due to her size and its impact on her mental health, including her struggle with an eating disorder (3). Winslet revealed that early in her career, people frequently chastised her for not meeting Hollywood's ideal of being slender, which had a significant negative effect on her self-esteem. In spite of these unpleasant experiences, she has grown to be a fervent supporter of body positivity, speaking out against body shaming and inspiring people to love their bodies with authenticity and confidence.

Body shaming has serious psychological and emotional repercussions and can lead to bullying. *Maryvale* finds a connection between bullying and body shaming. Body shaming, a negative societal judgment of physical appearance, is a growing issue, particularly among teenagers. This can lead to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and increased vulnerability to bullying (2). Body shaming, a type of bullying based on physical appearance judgments, relates to this understanding of the negative impacts of bullying. Body shaming, as other types of bullying, may have a devastating effect on mental health, particularly among young people, by fostering a poisonous environment in which victims endure constant humiliation. This ongoing devaluation negatively affects

self-esteem and emotional health, leading to long-lasting consequences such as anxiety, sadness, and even suicidal thoughts.

In Attilya Binti Zainal's words, people have diverse body shapes and sizes, and everyone possesses unique beauty regardless of appearance. Zainal highlights the importance of using words wisely, as they hold great power to influence others. Instead of degrading remarks, she advocates for positive and uplifting criticism to foster happiness and well-being. The context links back to Marxism, particularly the concept of commodity fetishism explored in *Das Kapital*. This concept argues that under capitalism, the value of a product becomes more about its exchange value and cultural meaning than its actual use value. In his book *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx examines several features of capitalism, such as private ownership of the means of production, the commodification of goods and labour, exploitation of labour, market competition, capital accumulation, and social class division.

Marx's views on capitalism indirectly contribute to the promotion of fashion shows, body exposure, and conventional beauty standards through the commodification of labour and the pursuit of profit. Under capitalism, industries such as fashion operate within a competitive market where businesses aim to maximize profit by appealing to consumer desires. This can result in the production and promotion of clothing and beauty products that align with prevailing beauty standards, which may include body exposure and conventional ideals of beauty. Additionally, the capitalist system's emphasis on consumption and status symbols may encourage individuals to participate in fashion shows and conform to societal expectations of beauty in order to attain social acceptance and success within the capitalist framework. In Adorno and Horkheimer's words, societal

pressures and norms, influenced by various factors including culture industry, can perpetuate unrealistic beauty ideals, leading to feelings of inadequacy and body shaming among individuals who do not fit these standards:

Art, morality, and sublime love are masks of nature, in which nature reappears transformed and becomes expressive as its own antithesis. Through its masks, it acquires the gift of speech; in its distortion, it manifests its essence; beauty is the serpent, which displays the wound where once the fang was implanted. Yet behind man's admiration for beauty lurks always the ringing laughter, the boundless scorn, the barbaric obscenity vented by potency on impotence, with which it numbs the secret fear that it is itself enslaved to impotence, to death, to nature. (207)

Things like art, morality, and love are like masks that nature wears. These masks make nature look different and let it express itself in new ways. They say that beauty is like a snake showing where it was hurt before. However, behind our admiration for beauty, there is often laughter, scorn, and even cruelty. This comes from the fear that we are powerless in the face of nature and death. The authors argue that a regular occurrence is the assessment of one's looks, which some people actively seek out while others want to avoid it (Schlüter et al. 1). It highlights that we all experience having our appearance judged by others, which is a very normal part of social interaction. However, people react to this judgement in different ways. Some try their best to avoid judgment altogether, perhaps by shying away from attention or dressing in a way that makes them feel less conspicuous. They discuss body shaming as an unsolicited, mostly negative comment about someone's body, occurring both online and in real life (4). On the other hand, there

are those who actively seek out judgements about their appearance, maybe through sharing photos on social media or participating in events where their looks are a central focus.

On the internet, negative remarks regarding appearance predominate and frequently outnumber compliments. The phrase "body shaming," which can be used both online and offline has emerged because of this. Robert Scholes notes, "Films can combine images and words" (247). Films mix words and pictures to tell a story. While words, through dialogue or narration, give context, emotion, and depth, images express the tale visually and enhance the viewer's comprehension and involvement. He further adds that we see what happens in a film. We can hear and see them. The filmmaker's problem is to give them human significance without overstating their significance for the viewer (266). Filmmakers must carefully create a film's visual and aural components with meaning, letting the audience figure out the significance on their own rather than imposing it.

Through the promotion of limited, idealized body standards in the media, fashion, and advertising, capitalism commodified beauty by giving consumers the impression that they must purchase goods in order to achieve "perfection." Such profit-driven system marginalized diverse body types, reinforcing body shaming by equating physical appearance with social and economic success. In her essay "Beauty", Susan Sontag argues that the Greeks viewed beauty as a reflection of inner excellence – a person of good character would naturally possess outward beauty as well. In contrast, Western society, according to Sontag, focuses on a more superficial kind of beauty – physical attractiveness. This focus, she argues, disproportionately burdens women, who people

judge and value primarily on their looks, while they assess men based on a broader range of qualities. This emphasis on external beauty creates a system that pressures women to conform to unrealistic standards and ultimately limits their potential. She writes:

For the Greeks, beauty was a virtue: a kind of excellence. People assumed these people were what we now have to call entire persons, a lame, jealous term. If it did occur to the Greeks to distinguish between a person's "inside" and "outside", they still expected that inner beauty would match beauty of the other kind. The well-born young Athenians who gathered around Socrates found it quite paradoxical that their hero was so intelligent, so brave, so honourable, so seductive-and so ugly. (268)

Sontag explains how the Greeks viewed beauty as more than just appearances that individuals considered complete and enviable displayed. Ancient Greek culture associated beauty with greatness, combining outward beauty with within attributes like courage, honour, and knowledge. The Greeks wanted people's inner and outer identities to be harmonious, even if they may have acknowledged the difference between the two. They felt that inner beauty should be equal to outer beauty. Sontag highlights an intriguing paradox by referencing the well-born young Athenians who admired Socrates, a figure renowned for his intelligence, bravery, and charm, yet deemed physically unattractive.

Body shaming developed because of culture industry's appreciation of external attractiveness. It produced unattainable beauty standards that devalued some body types while elevating others. As a result, society subjected anyone who did not live up to these standards to discrimination, ridicule, and pressure to fit in. In addition to feeding

companies that profited from weight loss, cosmetic surgery, and beauty products, this continual reinforcement of idealized bodies exacerbated insecurities.

Critical Analysis of Primary Texts

In the film *Wonder*, Jacob Tremblay plays August or Auggie, a young child with a condition called Treacher Collins syndrome who has received 27 surgeries since birth. After years of home schooling, Auggie's mother (Julia Roberts) sends him to a conventional school against the wishes of Auggie's father (Owen Wilson). When others surround Auggie, he experiences all the issues that come with being the odd one out: his classmates Jack (Noah Jupe), Julian (Bryce Gheisar), Charlotte (Elle McKinnon) and many more tease him, examine him, and greet him with distrust. Writing review of the film, *Splingmovies.com* explains the emotional aspects of the character Auggie:

Injecting a fantasy element, mostly through the theme of being an astronaut, *Wonder* lives up to its name. Auggie's astronaut helmet and daydreams intermingle with his waking life, adding another dimension and serving as a curious platform for many offbeat *Star Wars* references. While as bizarre as the dancing baby in *Ally McBeal*, they are welcome distractions from the pangs of emotion. *Wonder* is heartrending but in the same breath, it is delightful and funny, creating a place for life's soaring highs, crushing lows and everything in between.

(par. 5)

In this film, emotions take centre stage, mingling with Auggie's dreams of being the story a cool twist and making room for fun *Star Wars* nods. Even though the story can be sad at times, like the sad dancing baby in *Ally McBeal*, these fantasies help lighten the mood. *Wonder* is all about feeling deeply, with moments that make our heart ache but also make

us smile, capturing the difficulties of life in a special way. *Spling* again reviews *Wonder* as a heart-warming and life-affirming film that combines strong performances, sharp writing, and balanced direction, making it both entertaining and emotionally impactful (6). Tackling themes of human nature, othering, and society's struggle with conformity, it is a crowd-pleaser likely to receive award nominations. Peter Bradshaw supports it in his review in *The Guardian* and comments positively that *Wonder* is a feel-good drama that is overly emotional and tries too hard to make the audience feel good. The film seems to have nice intentions, yet its intentions can be just as fake as everything else in it can (par.3). Bradshaw further analyses the acting of various actors of this film.

Halim and Syamsudin have divided the characters of *Wonder* into six groups including protagonist, antagonist, secondary, extra, round, and flat. They have also found seven moral values including respect and care for others, self-respect with humility, self-discipline and responsibility, commitment to something greater than oneself, and care for the environment (62). They conclude that Auggie serves as the primary focal point and delivers significant insights into the creator's ideas or purpose. Auggie serves as the primary lens through which the movie examines topics of acceptance, empathy, and what true beauty means because of his particular experiences and difficulties as a boy with facial defects. The audience is able to observe directly the effects of discrimination and the transformational potential of compassion through his journey of self-discovery and assimilation into regular school life. The movie skilfully illustrates the value of seeing past outward manifestations and appreciating each person's intrinsic worth via Auggie's point of view.

In her thesis, Rina Wafirotur Rosyda has analysed language style of the protagonist Auggie. She has also discussed on the social and psychological factors that influenced his language style. She found that Auggie used four different kinds of language styles such as formal, consultative, informal, and intimate styles. Rosyda concluded that the casual approach was the one that Auggie used the most in the *Wonder* movie (105). He has used a casual style when talking to his family members and close friends in his home, bedroom, dining room, party, family room, park, and the school cafeteria. Following that, greetings, explaining a situation, and talking about a case are the subjects covered in this manner (97-8).

According to Rosyda, this casual style reflects Auggie's comfort and familiarity with his close relationships. It also emphasizes how crucial these connections are to his life because they provide him a feeling of acceptance and belonging. This style is a form of informal communication typically used in relaxed, familiar settings where there is a close relationship or rapport between speakers, such as among friends, family, or peers. It prioritizes ease and comfort over formal rules, often disregarding strict grammatical conventions and proper syntax. Vocabulary tends to be colloquial, incorporating regional dialects, slang, contractions (e.g., "gonna," "wanna"), or localized expressions that reflect shared cultural or social identities. Sentences may be fragmented, abbreviated, or loosely structured, relying more on context and nonverbal cues than on formal linguistic precision.

Farah Dibaj's thesis adds to Rosyda that dialogue in film is comprised of three key elements: dialect, context, and meaning (18). Dialect provides insights into the culture, origin, and time depicted in the film. Context and meaning, however, are crucial

for understanding the deeper significance of the dialogue. By grasping the context and meaning embedded within the spoken words, viewers can unlock hidden layers of information and appreciate the dialogue's impact on the narrative and other cinematic elements. Therefore, Dibaj argues that comprehending these aspects of dialogue is essential for a thorough analysis of any film.

Auggie, first battles feelings of difference and loneliness. His inability to fit in at school has led him to believe that he is anything but normal, even if he possesses traits like brilliance, humour, and friendship loyalty. He struggles with poor self-esteem, which manifests as nervousness about other people's perceptions and pessimism about his appearance. Auggie, on the other hand, changes and progressively gains self-acceptance and high self-esteem. His opinion of himself has significantly changed because of this voyage, as he not only accepts his appearance but also even acknowledges his own beauty.

Similarly, in the film *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, Sandhya's character exemplifies how Sontag's theory of beauty as a virtue extends beyond physical attributes. K. K. Mishra, in his article, highlights Bollywood comedies' evolving role in promoting body positivity, shifting from stigmatizing non-conventional body types to challenging stereotypes and fostering self-acceptance. According to Mishra, films like *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (2015) exemplify this change, with Bhumi Pednekar portraying an overweight protagonist, whose character emphasizes dignity and self-worth, countering societal prejudices (38). Through humour, such films engage audiences in sensitive conversations about body image, destigmatizing diverse identities and advocating for societal acceptance. Mishra underscores how these narratives reshape perceptions, transitioning from body shaming

to celebrating individuality. Sayanty Chatterjee and Aysha Viswamohan argue in the second part of the book *Women in Contemporary Indian Films and Media* that *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (2015) engages with the concept of the "gaze" directed at a fat female body, a significant departure from the typical visualization of heroines in Bollywood cinema ("Glocal Contestations"). This film challenges conventional beauty standards and the associated objectification of women by focusing on the protagonist Sandhya's journey of self-acceptance and empowerment despite societal pressures regarding her weight.

Chatterjee and Vishwamohan suggest that *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* reflects a broader trend in Hindi cinema where female characters in small-town settings become agents of social change, claiming ownership over their bodies and challenging pre-existing notions of female identity and subjectivity. By exploring the "gaze" and body politics, *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* contributes to a growing conversation about body positivity within the context of popular Bollywood films.

In *Jump Cut*, Diksha Mittal agrees with Chatterjee and Viswamohan's review of *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* as a noteworthy movie because of its depiction of a plump female lead (par. 2). Mittal underscores the film's significance in relation to fat studies and stresses how uncommon such portrayal is, especially in modern cinema. She contends that the theoretical underpinnings of fat studies offer an essential prism for analysing the neoliberal Indian media environment, specifically with regard to body depiction. Mittal's emphasis on *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*'s "return" of the obese actress supports Chatterjee and Viswamohan's contention that the movie subverts traditional Bollywood heroine norms and advances a larger discussion about body positivity.

Most of the reviews are made on the actress of *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* and the performance of the actors. Diksha Mittal argues that post-2010, Bollywood cinema in India began reintroducing fat actresses in significant roles, following a two-decade trend of thin actresses as protagonists. *Dum Laga ke Haisha*, a romantic comedy, features a fat actress as Sandhya (4). To appeal to a conservative audience, the film incorporates elements that reinforce traditional masculinity and patriarchal norms. Through a textual analysis of the protagonist's character development and performance, Mittal concludes that despite the character's initial assertiveness, the film's narrative arc undercuts her "fat activism" and ultimately reinforces male voyeurism, even while superficially appearing to subvert gendered expectations.

In her article, Mittal points out the example of Sridevi, from the 1980s, to illustrate how Hindi cinema, prior to the 1990s, often-featured actresses with fuller figures in significant roles (8). She shows that although these actresses were sometimes sexualized (as evidenced by the nickname "thunder thighs"), they still held prominent positions in the industry. Mittal contrasts this with the later trend towards thinner actresses, suggesting a shift in societal beauty standards and the types of roles available to women in Bollywood. By referencing Sridevi, an actress, and the director's public appreciation of her "voluptuous beauty," Mittal highlights a time when a wider range of body types were accepted and even celebrated in mainstream Hindi cinema, thus strengthening her argument about the changing representation of female bodies and the potential loss of fat-positive representation.

Shailendra Kumar Singh talks about how the movie *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* subverts conventional notions of beauty by emphasizing its obese female leads. In

contrast to conventional fat shame, he contends that this film shows its protagonists as attractive and daring, generating a subversive discourse that challenges societal prejudices and stereotypes. Singh argues that the shift toward conventionally "beautiful" heroines in Hindi films was driven by the success of "beauty queens" like Sushmita Sen, Aishwarya Rai, Priyanka Chopra, and others who used their pageant victories as a stepping-stone into Bollywood (par. 6). Their presence assisted to disrupt conventional norms of beauty in Hindi cinema by reinforcing new notions of beauty. On the other hand, Ranjani Mazumdar analyses *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* through the lens of obsolescence describing how the portrayal of antiquated technologies exposes and gives voice to histories and experiences that society excludes (540-41).

Mazumdar talks about how movies like *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* create a feeling of obsolescence by showing outmoded media items. She contends that these movies serve as "archaeological sites" that introduce underrepresented areas and tales from the analogue era into the mainstream. According to Mazumdar, by exposing obsolescence as a temporal register, people are able to explore a hidden history of Indian cinema that challenges our perceptions of past, present and future of media (547). In her article, she has examined obsolescence in this film that challenges our understanding of media's temporal progression.

Abhijit Bhaduri also has published a review of *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* in *The Times of India*. According to Bhaduri, groups use the expression "Dum Laga Ke Haisha" when attempting to push, drag, or move anything that is extremely heavy and requires all of their resources (2). Bhaduri argues that this film succeeds through its intelligent, non-condescending humor, strong storyline, compelling performances by Bhumi Pednekar

and Ayushmann Khurana, and the beautiful musical score, though he criticizes the final song as a superfluous attempt to appease viewers uncomfortable with the film's portrayal of an overweight heroine (7).

Bhumi Pednekar, during her interview with *News18*, talks about criticism that she has faced from trolls about her body size, but she has learned to ignore them over time. Pednekar believes that trolls will always find something negative to say, even if she dresses modestly. She thinks that troll culture has become common and even family members sometimes criticize others (00:00:34 - 00:1:25). Pednekar developed resilient to these trolls and recalls people telling her since childhood that she would look better if she lost weight. She criticizes the trolls for their hypocritical behaviour, saying they claim to preserve culture but use disrespectful language. In *The Indian Express*, Shubhra Gupta writes:

The first thing you should know about *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* is that it has a story. Verily, the thing that movies ought to have before they get made, the very thing that Bollywood forgets, unbelievably, so often. The story is the basis of a solid, honest-to-goodness script, a lead couple that wins you over gradually but surely, and a bunch of actors who know exactly where they are at. (par. 1)

In comparison to most of the Bollywood stereotypes, the couple of Prem and Sandhya are physically unmatched, but the review suggests that as the movie progresses, the story becomes more compelling and impactful. The *Hindu.Com* states that it considers "face value" a term that makers frequently misuse in films and extends beyond them into our daily lives. According to the publication, mainstream films have established narrow standards of beauty and body types, leading people to often judge others solely based on

their appearance. It also mentions that *Yash Raj Films* is frequently responsible for perpetuating these narrow and unrealistic ideals. According to Diksha Mittal, a fat actress portrays the protagonist of *Dum Laga ke Haisha*, which is an unusual occurrence. The importance of fat studies in media analysis and the film's significance both overlap, especially when it comes to evaluating the media environment in capitalist India.

Mittal argues: “A common consensus grew in the country that though business growth is at the root of prosperity, unchecked business interest and excessive greed makes one fat, and representations of business greed were through images of fat rich people” (par. 15). People believed that business growth was good for the economy, but they worried that businesses could become too greedy and selfish. They used images of overweight people to represent this excessive greed. This film breaks the convention by casting a fat actress in a leading role, challenging typical beauty standards perpetuated in mainstream cinema.

Departure

While academics have extensively studied the themes, characters, dialogues and plots of *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, there is a notable gap in literature concerning their specific portrayal of body shaming and its impact on characters. Scholars rarely study body shaming because they frequently disregard its topical nature and consider it less important than issues like poverty or gender violence. Furthermore, academics see mainstream movies as peculiarities rather than change agents because of the persistence of beauty standards in these productions. There is a lack of scholarly and public attention to body shaming research.

There has been a lot of research on the psychological and societal effects of body shaming, but not as much on how movies make these problems worse. Despite criticism of *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*'s story, acting, and social concerns, their subtle depiction of body shaming and its link to culture industry have not received enough scholarly attention. The researcher seeks to fill this gap by examining how these films depict body shaming through verbal and non-verbal signals, visual features, and character interactions, and link it to capitalist beauty standards. This dissertation aims to add to the larger discussion on cinematic representation of body shaming by analysing these films, hoping to provide fresh perspectives on portrayals of beauty standards for the Nepali film industry.

Chapter III

Methodology

This dissertation uses a qualitative approach to investigate how *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* portray body shaming with a particular emphasis on visual analysis. Although I am interested in Nepali films, I have chosen these two non-Nepali films because finding Nepali resources discussing body shaming in Nepali society is very difficult, and people are unaware of how harmful it is. I hope to inform Nepali filmmakers about the negative effects of body shaming by using these non-Nepali films as important examples. To enhance the analysis of body image representation, the research has involved closely examining the films to collect data, supported by additional resources, including scholarly works and web archives. This methodological approach evaluates the impact of films on complex societal concerns, such as body shaming, and highlights the dynamic nature of films in capturing these themes. In order to provide insight on the ways that films address or perpetuate body shaming, the dissertation aims to dissect how these films depict physical appearance and societal beauty standards using a combination of visual and narrative analysis.

These films serve as valuable representatives of visual art that shed light on the prevalence and consequences of body shaming within Nepali society. Given the common occurrence of body shaming in Nepali cinema, these two films offer pertinent case studies for examining the phenomenon in depth. The primary data collection tools for this research has involved watching of the selected films as the central source of information. By carefully watching the selected movies, this study aims to extract relevant data regarding the depiction of body shaming. Additionally, the researcher has sourced

supplementary data from a combination of online repositories and library resources, enriching the analysis with scholarly perspectives and contextual understanding. The utilization of films as a primary data source offers a rich and dynamic platform for exploring the complexities of body shaming representation within the Nepali cultural environment. Through this methodological framework, the research endeavours to unveil the body image portrayal, and its impact on societal perceptions and individual well-being.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation has observed body shaming through the lens of culture industry. The critical analysis of body shaming via the prism of visual culture and representation is the foundation of this dissertation's conceptual framework. According to this study, body shaming is a phenomenon that is firmly rooted in the way that media portray beauty standards, in addition to being a social problem. My analysis incorporates Adorno and Horkheimer's criticism of the culture business, which holds that films reinforce unattainable beauty standards in order to further capitalist goals. This paradigm directs the examination of how the visual and narrative components of these films contradict prevailing standards of beauty and body size, influencing viewers' perceptions of themselves and the dynamics of society around body shaming.

In his book *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson makes an argument that postmodern culture—which is marked by shallow imitation, the commodification of everything, and a lack of historical consciousness has taken over as a result of late capitalism (85). Jameson further clarifies that currently, it is difficult to discern authentic artistic expression from commercialized spectacle since

capitalist logic intricately entwines cultural production. Using theoretical frameworks including Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry, this study looks at how these movies contradict prevailing ideas of beauty. Individuals living in capitalist society are constantly under pressure to live up to unrealistic standards of beauty such as body shape or size, skin, facial features, hair, age and so on. Cultural ideals, art, media, social status and power link them. Although movies frequently reflect society standards, they may also be extremely important in questioning them.

The purpose of this study is to examine that movies such as *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* illustrate how culture industry promotes beauty standards in films, leading to body shaming. My analysis examines the films' settings and character's attire, culture, profession, nature, living standard, and schooling to demonstrate the influence of capitalist culture. In *Wonder*, students look highly influenced by cinema, so they use words like "Freak", "monster", "ugly," "Freddy Krueger" and so on to insult Auggie. They gaze him, but he does not like to be gazed. Similarly, in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, Sandhya's relatives crack jokes at her telling her "fat cow", "witch" and her husband Prem is the most dissatisfied one due to her body size.

This study intends to advance knowledge of the cultural dynamics surrounding body image and self-perception as makers have portrayed them in these films, particularly in the context of Nepali society, where there is still a lack of awareness of the detrimental effects of body shaming. The study investigates how these films create, uphold, or subvert conventional standards of beauty by combining semiotic and discourse analysis. For example, I have analysed how *Wonder* sketches Auggie's facial differences

and how *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* Portrays Sandhya's weight. Characters of both films are products of capitalist culture.

In their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that beauty in movies and popular culture is not real or original. Everything is a copy, like actors imitating each other and girls in Texas trying to look like movie stars. This fake kind of beauty is there to control us. It keeps us entertained and happy for a short while, but it is not real happiness (112). Karl Marx himself did not write about manufactured beauty in the way Adorno and Horkheimer do. His main works, like *Das Kapital* focuses on economics and class struggle. However, his ideas can still connect to this critique of beauty.

Marx argues that capitalism is all about the rich (bourgeoisie) getting richer by exploiting the labour of the working class (proletariat). He might see the culture industry as another way the rich control the working class. Movies and pop culture offer a fake kind of happiness to keep people distracted from the problems of capitalism. They also create unrealistic beauty standards that make people feel bad about themselves and spend money on products to fit in. I have presented some data from both films to verify how capitalism has promoted conventional beauty standards that result body shaming.

On the other hand, my texts are visual texts, so by examining movie shots, scenes, sequences, camera angles, and verbal and non-verbal cues, I have investigated how these films visualize body shaming. I have applied the theory of visual methodologies, as described by Gillian Rose, to analyse the representation of body image and its potential for body shaming in these chosen films. Rose discusses the various approaches of analysing and comprehending pictures, including those found in paintings, movies, ads,

and photographs. She discusses the significance of visuals, and about how people's interpretations vary depending on their upbringing and worldview. She presents many approaches, such as examining the creation of a picture, its content, and the responses of viewers. She also discusses how history, culture, and power shape produce and interpret images.

Rose asserts that there are three essential elements in a critical approach to visual text analysis (16). Primarily, we need to take pictures seriously by closely examining them and realizing that they are more than just a reflection of society. Second, as images impact and mould people's perceptions of the world, including who is included and who is not, we should take into account the social conditions and impacts of images. Third, since society, culture and history influence our perspective, we need to examine how we view images. We can comprehend more fully and responsibly visuals when we are conscious of how we interpret them. This analysis incorporates interpretations to decode signs and symbols related to body size, and discourse analysis to examine how these films construct narratives around body image.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework examines the ways in which aesthetic components in *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* create and convey body shaming. To learn how these films show physical size and facial deformities, I have examined visual signals like makeup, costume, facial expressions, and character's activities. This study specifically has looked at how camera angles, such as long views or close-ups highlight or minimize body-related problems. The study also looks at how these movies use verbal clues, such as conversations, jokes, and insults to build body shaming. This research work seeks to

offer a thorough understanding of how these films address the problem of body image by examining both language and visual components.

In the words of Gillian Rose, each image contains unique formal components that influence our perception, including colour, shape, and composition. The technology employed to produce, duplicate, or exhibit the image may influence these factors. We can better comprehend how the image conveys its message by paying special attention to these characteristics (23). The interpretative approach concentrates on dissecting the films' underlying themes of identity, physical image, and social standing as well as how they relate to questions of control and power. Via an emphasis on dialogue, body language, and character interactions, this approach deciphers the films' messages about the psychological and social effects of body shaming. In order to find recurrent themes, patterns, and symbols associated with body shaming, the researcher has utilized a thematic analysis technique.

Tools and Methods

The following points best sum up the main tools and techniques employed in this study:

- **Visual Analysis:** I have used this technique for thorough investigation of the films' visual components and verbal and nonverbal cues to support or depict body shaming including lighting, colour scheme, and camera angles.
- **Narrative Analysis:** I have performed a narrative analysis, closely examining the films' narratives and focusing on the characters' experiences, conversations, signs, symbols, and plot development.

- Thematic Analysis: I have discovered and analysed recurrent themes, patterns, and symbols associated with body shaming in these films.
- Interpretations: I have interpreted these films from the lens of capitalism to show how it glorifies body shaming.

Perspective

Can we have fun by insulting others? True fun comes from uplifting and respecting one another, not from mocking someone's body shape or size, as such behaviour only spreads negativity and harm. Priyanka Karki, a Nepali actress, describes in "Subha Podcast" about how she has encountered instances of disrespect toward herself and other guests on comedy reality shows. She has since urged producers to edit out such segments, emphasizing the importance of balancing humour with respect. "There's a thin line between being funny and being disrespectful," she adds. "I won't tolerate disrespect—if they're going to poke fun at me, I should be able to enjoy it just as much as everyone else" (00:05:39- 00:06:16). People frequently blur the "thin line" between comedy and contempt by passing off body shaming as jokes, not realizing how such remarks reinforce negative stereotypes. Because of highly embedded beauty standards, they automatically make judgments about people based on their appearance or weight, normalizing ridicule instead of encouraging self-acceptance. Since critics refuse to acknowledge the harmful impact of their comments and instead defend them as harmless fun.

Wonder and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* provide insightful analyses of the feminist, media, and cultural aspects of body shaming in Nepal and South Asia. These films explore how society sketches body-shaming, drawing on deeply ingrained cultural

conventions and expectations surrounding gender, beauty, and social standing. They shed light on how popular culture either upholds or subverts these standards. The analysis of media studies looks at how the media shapes and affects cultural beliefs. These movies function as potent media texts that propagate and either support or contradict prevailing ideas of beauty in the context of *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*.

The research also investigates how films use body shaming to objectify and monetize women. Feminist approaches offer vital insights into the gendered nature of body shaming. These films demonstrate how societal demands disproportionately influence women to adhere to limited beauty standards. By studying the characters' experiences and the cultural messages presented, the research analyses how these films maintain or challenge patriarchal norms and stereotypes connected to body image. These films are relevant to audiences in South Asia and Nepal because they can relate to the real-life experiences of many people whom others body shame.

The movies' depictions of the detrimental effects of body shaming, like mental anguish, social exclusion, and missed opportunities, might increase awareness and start discussions about these problems. Furthermore, these films can empower viewers to confront and oppose these detrimental influences by highlighting how capitalism defines beauty standards and fosters body image dissatisfaction. Filmmakers, driven by the culture industry's logic, produce spectacles that normalize oppressive beauty standards and cultivate self-hatred, aiding mass deception and reinforcing control.

Chapter IV

Body Shaming on Screen

In a *Youtube* channel *Gorkha Station*, Nepali filmmaker Nabin Subba critiques body shaming as a form of fascism and draws attention to the lack of prominent Madhesi actresses in the country's cinematic landscape (00:44:47-00:46:55). He points out that because of long-standing prejudices that view Madhesi women as unsuited for leading parts, makers forced non-Madhesi performers like Deepak Raj Giri and Deepa Shree Niraula to play Madhesi characters, Ram Vilas and Dhaniya. Subba encourages political, academic, media, and artistic leaders to join in confronting these biases and fostering a transformative change in cultural attitudes. People asked actor Deepak Raj Giri to get his teeth fixed because they thought it would diminish his heroic persona, but he refused, accepting it as a part of who he was. By doing this, he subverts traditional ideals of beauty and shows that people with a variety of physical characteristics may be heroes as well (00:39:28-00:39:40). This change is a reflection of the Nepali film industry's evolving definition of heroism.

In Nepal, the conventional belief that heroes and heroines ought to be tall, fair, and attractive looking is slowly being questioned. Actors such as Dayahang Rai, Bipin Karki, Saugat Malla, Deepak Raj Giri, Jitu Nepal, Diya Maskey, Menuka Pradhan, and Miruna Magar are defying these preconceptions via their varied personas and skill. In the Nepali film business, their success redefines beauty standards and demonstrates a rising embrace of individualism.

In her essay "A Woman's Beauty: Put-Down or Power Source?" Susan Sontag discusses how the concept of beauty has changed throughout history and across cultures.

This directly argues against the idea of beauty standards as universal truths. She argues that beauty standards are not universal truths but rather cultural constructions that shift over time and place. By applying this lens to these films, my dissertation explores how the films *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* depict dominant beauty ideals and how these ideals might influence or challenge viewers' perceptions of their own bodies.

Susan Sontag argues: “The best theory of beauty is its history. Thinking about the history of beauty means focusing on its deployment in the hands of specific communities” (209). Sontag suggests that to understand beauty, we should look at its past. By studying how different groups have used beauty, we can learn a lot about what it means. Profit-driven, the beauty business repeatedly uses product marketing and advertising to push limited ideals. This constant emphasis on a manufactured idea of beauty fosters a body-shaming society and consumer dissatisfaction.

Wonder and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* portray the practice of body shaming through a variety of narrative decisions and visual elements that emphasize the psychological and emotional effects of social norms on people. *Wonder* illustrates body shaming by depicting the nasty comments and isolation that result from Auggie's facial deformity through the bullying and mockery he experiences at school. Viewers may feel the weight of Auggie's battle against social judgment as the movie highlights his suffering and loneliness through close-up views and spectator comments. The disparaging remarks made about Sandhya by her family and society in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* serve as an example of body shaming.

The use of contrasting shots emphasize the contrast between Sandhya's self-acceptance and the negativity she encounters, which juxtapose her happy moments with

her brother's insults. The characters' responses to Sandhya's appearance are a criticism on the unattainable beauty standards that are common in Indian society, and the speech in the movie is full of fat shaming terminology.

Body Shaming as the Theme

According to *Social and Emotional Learning Resource Finder*, we can consider body shaming as one of the major themes of *Wonder*, as the film explores how Auggie's facial differences make him a target of bullying and judgment. Both *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, explore the subject of body shaming, however in distinct settings. *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* centers around body shaming but in Indian context, where the pressure to conform to societal beauty standards is focused on weight. In order to illustrate how fat shaming pervades both personal relationships and cultural standards, this film portrays the narrative of Prem, a man who feels ashamed of his wife Sandhya due to her weight, while *Wonder* follows the journey of a little child with a facial deformity as he negotiates a world that condemns him for his appearance. For the protagonists of these movies, body shaming is a major issue. They declare that emphasizing outward appearances is pointless and that inside attributes are more significant.

Airtel notes that *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* boldly challenges regressive conventions, although mainstream Bollywood frequently exalts them. Body shaming is also a theme in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, which shows how people, especially by her husband and society reject Sandhya and make fun of her body size. Despite having diverse settings and cultures, both films highlight how deeply embedded body shaming is in our ideas of value and beauty. While filming, Bhumi Pednekar weighed about 75 kg, which went against Bollywood's preoccupation with slender females. Her unaltered, natural

appearance gave credibility to Sandhya's Character in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*. On the other hand, *Wonder* weaves body shaming into the core of the narrative, as the protagonist, August Pullman (Auggie), struggles with societal acceptance due to his facial difference caused by a genetic condition.

The film portrays the daily challenges Auggie faces—from bullying to exclusion—because of his appearance, highlighting how body shaming is not limited to overt insults but also manifests in subtle forms of rejection and avoidance. Through its portrayal of Auggie's experiences, *Wonder* encourages viewers to reflect on the emotional toll of judging based on physical appearance, while also exploring how compassion, understanding, and friendship can combat such biases.

Body Shaming by Verbal Cues

One of the most common ways that people and organizations transmit information is through verbal communication, which includes both written and oral forms (Adhikari et al. 85). Interviews, meetings, briefings, formal presentations, phone conversations, and video conferences are just a few of the various ways that oral communication can occur. The film *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* features dialogues filled with fat-shaming language, and the characters' responses to Sandhya's appearance reflect a commentary on the unrealistic beauty standards that are prevalent in Indian culture. Sandhya experiences severe body shaming from both her family and husband, underscoring how commonplace fat shaming is in her life. Her brother cruelly insults her and says that she always looks like a "witch" (00:33:49), reinforcing negative stereotypes about unattractiveness and making her feel unworthy. Sandhya's brother's "witch" insult, disguised as a joke, reveals a deeper cruelty that attacks her self-esteem and exemplifies the damaging nature of body shaming by

those closest to us. He further denigrates her when he refers to her as a "fat cow" (00:55:07), a disparaging term that not only targets her weight but also dehumanizes her by reducing her identity to a mere physical attribute.

As shown in fig. 4.1, these comments from Sandhya's own brother exacerbate the emotional toll that body shaming has on her, which highlight the detrimental effects of such disparaging comments on a person's mental health and highlight how deeply rooted societal biases can influence

interpersonal relationships and self-esteem. She complains her parents that her husband told her a "fat cow" (00:55:07) and it slowly

results the divorce. There is hatred, slap, quarrel, blaming,

shouts and so on in the family because Prem ignores the presence of Sandhya. In this way, the film's dialogue is rich with fat-shaming language, and the characters' reactions to Sandhya's appearance serve as a commentary on the unrealistic beauty standards prevalent in Indian culture.

As Prem's father asks him why he dislikes Sandhya, Prem's rejection is concise and direct, rooted in her body size (00:07:36). The film shows Prem as an underachiever who lacks self-assurance and life purpose. Due to his lack of education and repeated failures on his tenth-grade tests, he has a low sense of self-worth. Prem does not have a prestigious or well-paying career; instead, he works at his family's little cassette shop, which is a dying industry in the age of digital music. Sandhya's education and confidence



Fig. 4.1. Sandhya's brother's verbal insults in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (00:33:46)

exacerbate his insecurities and discontent in his marriage, which contrasts strongly with his lack of academic achievement and career opportunities. Sandhya's size still makes him loathe her. He does not like to walk with her in public.

When Prem hates Sandhya, most of his family members hate her too. Only Prem's father shows love and care for her. When Prem visits for a marriage ceremony of Nirmal, one of his relatives, he meets Sakha babu and his other friend there. When Nirmal proudly shows his bride's photo, Prem compares himself with a "blind-bull" because his father forcefully married him to Sandhya. He compares his life with hell and Nirmal's life with the heaven. Nirmal tells him looks are not important and Prem replies if looks are not important why he is showing him the photo of his wife Dipti (00:49:43-00:50:58). People consider looks are important due to societal standards and cultural perceptions that equate physical appearance with value, success, and desirability.

Prem is dissatisfied with Sandhya. Prem's categorization of Sandhya as a "fat bull" (00: 50:59) highlights his intense frustration and contempt for her looks, demonstrating how his prejudices control his emotions toward her. His statement demonstrates the extent of his body that he does not even enjoy touching her, much less engaging in any intimate activities, which minimizes Sandhya to her physical attributes and disregards her value as a human being. This instance effectively dehumanizes Sandhya and perpetuates the social stigma associated with body size, which not only reflects Prem's shallow view of beauty but also demonstrates the emotional harm inflicted by such disparaging language. In the end, Prem's remarks expose a poisonous mentality that values flimsy ideals over sincere respect and connection, thus sustaining the body-shaming cycle.

Likewise, in the other film *Wonder*, characters use many words to refer for Auggie. Julian, his classmate, calls him a word "freak" (01:08:57) that refers to a



Fig. 4.2. A forest scene of *Wonder* (01:35:01)

monster, and the boys in the woods also use the same word to insult him (01:35:01). The verbal body shaming that Auggie endures gets worse by Julian and

other people's usage of this insulting

epithet, which they intend to characterize him as strange or unnatural. It depicts Auggie as someone who does not fit the mould of what society views as "normal," cruelly and de-humanizingly highlighting his facial peculiarities. One of the youngsters uses the term "Gollum," (01:35:08) which is a reference to a figure from *The Lord of the Rings* who is characterized by his hideous, warped look and unsettling actions.

By referring to Auggie as "Gollum," the lads reinforce the sense that Auggie's appearance is something disgusting or terrifying by equating him with a figure who they frequently see as eerie and awful. In addition to insulting Auggie, these remarks expose the boys' damaging and naive understanding of physical distinctions. The phrase "Sarlacc Monster" refers to a creature from the *Star Wars* world that eats its prey in a gory manner and has a huge, gaping mouth full of razor fangs. In *Star Wars*, people refer to a young Jedi apprentice in training as a "Padawan". Jack, Auggie's classmate mixes these two allusions in a way that is both humorous and implicitly degrading when he tells Auggie, "You eat like the Sarlacc monster, my young Padawan," during lunch (00:19:39).

The comparison of Auggie's eating habits to those of the Sarlacc monster, which suggests that they are excessive, reinforces a negative perception of his facial deformities. In this dynamic, Jack positions himself as the superior figure by referring to Auggie as "Padawan," suggesting that he must "learn" how to act or blend in. This exchange demonstrates verbal body shaming, in which Jack makes fun of Auggie's looks and physically using pop culture allusions in a way that is both hurtful and socially acceptable. The supposedly light-hearted wording conceals underlying insult, which quietly marginalizes Auggie for being different. During Halloween, Auggie's classmates are making fun of him. Jack is carrying a mask and a girl refers the mask looks like Auggie. The conversation goes in the following ways:

A girl: It really does look like him.

Jack: This part right?

Amos: Yeah.

Julian: I mean, he's always reminded me of, like, the shrunken head, you know?

Amos: or an Orc.

Julian: Yeah. If I looked like him, I'd swear I'd put a hood over my face every day.

Jack: If I looked like him, I think I'd kill myself. (00:45:09–00:45:27)

Auggie's classmates body-bully him in this *Wonder* scene, overtly using horrific comparisons in their verbal cues. The phrase "shrunken head" describes a cultural custom where people reduced heads in size and maintained them, frequently resulting in deformed and malformed characteristics. By reducing Auggie's face features to something strange and unnatural, this analogy dehumanizes him. The word "Orc"

describes the fantastical beings from *The Lord of the Rings* that are renowned for their hideous, deformed looks.

His friends link Auggie to something repulsive and disgusting by equating him with an Orc. After Julian says he would hide his face, Jack says he would "kill himself" if he looked like Auggie, making an even harsher statement. By directly referencing Auggie's facial deformities and disparaging his physical features as something hideous or intolerable, these statements serve as an example of verbal body shaming. The conversation exposes the pervasive bigotry and hatred against Auggie because of his appearance through these damaging parallels.

Auggie enjoys Halloween, a prominent part of American culture, because it lets him blend in with the crowd and avoid the continual scrutiny of his appearance. He can



Fig. 4.3. A scene of Halloween from *Wonder* (00:45:30)

hide behind a mask because everyone disguises, and their disguises render his facial distinctions inconsequential, he may now walk among his peers without fear of criticism or

attention. He feels free and anonymous wearing the mask, providing a moment's relief from the body shaming and bullying he frequently experiences, but that Halloween becomes bitter for him because of his friend's bullying. Auggie thinks that he is like the plague for the people. He says bitterly his friends do not like to touch him because they think he is "contagious" (00:45:00).

Auggie's remark that his pals refrain from touching him because they believe he is "contagious" effectively conveys the intense anguish and anger he feels because of body shaming. Auggie emphasizes how his facial features lead people to perceive him as dangerous or ill, which furthers his sense of loneliness, by drawing a comparison between himself and the plague. The word "contagious" is used to describe how people's negative opinions about his appearance have spread like an infection and affected how they engage with him—or rather, how they avoid him. This bitter statement reveals Auggie's internalized feelings of rejection and alienation, as he believes that his deformity makes him untouchable and socially undesirable. As Auggie refuses to let Jack stay with him during lunch break, a group of girls observe and make negative comments about Auggie.

One of the girls sarcastically suggests that Jack may have touched Auggie and could not wash his hands in time, implying that Jack had "caught the plague" (00:54:17-00:54:23). This remark reinforces the idea that Auggie is somehow untouchable or contagious. Among the girls, only Summer stands up for Auggie, offering him support amidst the cruel comments. When she shakes her hands with him, the girls suspect that she has "the plague". By making rude remarks that compare Auggie to a sickness, the females encourage body shaming by reiterating the notion that his looks make him disgusting or contagious.

Their offensive remarks, which include allusions to "the plague," dehumanize Auggie and reinforce the notion that they should avoid him. Their statements' lack of awareness or empathy raises the possibility that they have not followed the advice they have received or that their families or schools have not adequately trained them on the negative effects of body shaming on others. It also demonstrates their behaviour. A

culture that condones such behaviour, in which individuals disregard the hurt caused by making fun of one's appearance, betrays a lack of tolerance and kindness.

In the film, some parents encourage body shaming in addition to the youngsters. According to Julian's mother, Auggie is the cause of Julian's nightmares, therefore they had to take him for treatment (01:28:39). Julian's mom edits Auggie's face out of a class photo to make him look more "normal" and less frightening to her son, showing her own bias against Auggie's appearance. This photo-editing action reinforces the notion that Auggie's face should be concealed or fixed, illustrating how even adults engage in body shaming. In addition to reinforcing unfavourable opinions about physical differences, Julian's mother sets a bad example for her child by doing this, teaching him to reject and be afraid of those who appear different rather than to accept them.

Body Shaming by Non-verbal Cues

The important components of non-verbal communication are body language, looks, and the physical surroundings (Adhikari et al. 86–87). Body language includes verbal tones, facial emotions, and gestures that all help to transmit the message. A person's appearance, including their attire and accessories, also affects how people see them. The actual environment, including its design and furnishings, affects how people communicate.

Other examples of nonverbal communication include signs, logos, and visuals. As some of tall, slender and fashionable girls stroll down the street, Prem follows and gazes them for

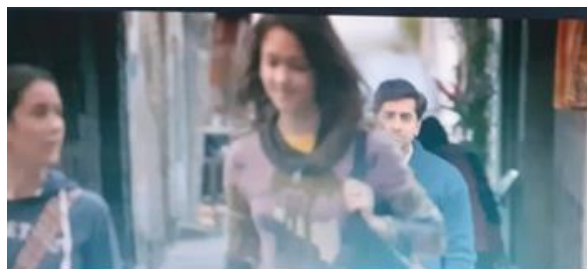


Fig. 4.4. Prem gazes some "slim" girls in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (00:23:00)

a while, indicating his preference for women who fit the conventional standards of beauty (00:23:05). This shows the choice of a modern man as his partner. His prolonged gaze on these women emphasizes his attraction to the societal ideal of slimness and beauty, highlighting the superficial criteria he uses to assess women. This moment starkly contrasts with his feelings towards Sandhya, whom he dismisses largely due to her body size, showing that societal standards has influenced Prem's idea of beauty. His silent appreciation of these women reflects his internalized belief that only slender, conventionally beautiful women are appealing, reinforcing his dissatisfaction with Sandhya based on her looks.

Sandhya in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* stands apart from the traditional or contemporary actors of Indian films, as filmmakers often portray them as slim, conventionally attractive, and glamorous. Sandhya challenges the conventional ideas of beauty that are common in Bollywood by being unabashedly plus-sized and self-assured in her appearance, in contrast to the standard image of the Indian heroine. Since her weight becomes a source of contention in her marriage to Prem, her physique plays a crucial role in the plot of the movie. Nevertheless, Sandhya's knowledge, independence, and strong feeling of self-worth—rather than her appearance—define her character. She rejects the stereotype of what a "heroine" in Indian cinema may look like by asserting her dignity rather than fitting the stereotype of a submissive, objectified character. Her appearance signifies a change in Indian cinema toward more realistic and inclusive depictions of women.

Prem frequently expresses unease and displeasure throughout the movie through his body language and facial expressions when he encounters Sandhya. His disdainful

gestures, eye rolls, and frowns convey his ingrained bias toward body shapes that do not conform to social norms. Prem's face does not seem happy that notices us his inner feeling. In the wedding scene, subtle gestures, expressions, and interactions vividly convey non-verbal body shaming (00:10:50–00:10:57). Although Sandhya sincerely tries to focus on Prem, he ignores her and displays his displeasure through his uninterested body language. His contemptuous attitude, which quietly expresses his displeasure with her appearance, highlights the lack of vocal communication. His family perplexed and unhappy expressions, which convey judgment without using words, are further evidence of this rejection.

We can express figure shaming through silent condemnation, as demonstrated by



Fig. 4.5. Prem carelessly takes pills in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (00: 11:22)

Nirmal, a relative's exaggerated facial expressions and mouth motions, which accentuate an implicit criticism of her figure. The spectator observes how Sandhya is isolated from the moment of her wedding due to the nonverbal communication of cultural standards

about body image. As fig. 4.5 shows, the way Prem carelessly takes a handful of capsules despite Sandhya's polite request to take just one is another subtle form of body shaming. We can interpret nonchalant behaviour as a passive-aggressive rejection of her concern and authority (00:11:23).

Sandhya's act of compassion, giving him medication, is an effort to build rapport and close the distance between them. Prem betrays his underlying bitterness and

emotional distance through his disobedience reaction, which he typifies by his thoughtlessly consuming several pills at once. His refusal to appreciate her caring gesture suggests a lack of interest in interacting with her, possibly because of his internalized prejudice against her looks. Although nobody speaks about it openly, this act of disobedience further solidifies the emotional and psychological distance he experiences because of the body-shaming narrative he is experiencing. In a number of times, Prem purposefully keeps a physical distance between himself and Sandhya and avoids touching her hand in social settings.

This nonverbal clue emphasizes his battle with society's ideals of beauty and conveys his discomfort about her weight, which eventually adds to Sandhya's feelings of insecurity and rejection (00:21:22). Body shaming can be expressed subtly but effectively through avoidance and distancing, as Prem's actions convey his humiliation about Sandhya's body without uttering a single word about her body and activities. Prem's discomfort and gestures while Sandhya walks arm in arm with him (00:21:32) are nonverbal cues of body shaming. His rigid body language and unwillingness to keep a physical relationship with her, which represent his internal conflict about her appearance, show how unhappy he is. Prem immediately avoids his friends when they notice them together and cry out to him, obviously embarrassed for his friends to see him with Sandhya.

His underlying humiliation is evident in his choice to send her to Vijay's store to make a purchase rather than bring her to meet his friends and family. Similarly, there is a rickshaw scene in the film where Sandhya travels with Prem by a rickshaw to the national

library (00:23:57-00:24:44). Prem's uneasiness and meek demeanour in the scene serve as a mild expression of nonverbal body shaming. Prem's awkward and aloof body language during their trip to the national library together emphasizes how uncomfortable he feels being physically near Sandhya in public. Despite their close proximity in the cramped rickshaw, his stiff stance and lack of interaction reveal his shame and refusal to acknowledge her existence. Prem's travel with her in a rickshaw increases discomfort. Rickshaw, which is an open vehicle where onlookers may readily observe them, since it increases the visibility of their physical presence together. This visual exposure

exacerbates his internalized body shaming since he feels that people around him as well as himself



are judging him. Even if he does not voice his

Fig. 4.6. The rickshaw ride scene from *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (00:23:57)

displeasure verbally, his distance and unwillingness to interact with Sandhya convey a tacit disapproval of her appearance, which supports the body-shaming dynamics in the film.

In the same way, the film *Wonder* also uses nonverbal techniques to reflect body shaming. Auggie says, "Meeting kids is harder than meeting adults are. Everyone makes the same face at first. But kids are not as good at hiding it, so I usually look down" (00:06:22). People gaze Auggie but he does not like to be gazed. Auggie highlights in the quotation the nonverbal cues he notices in people when they first meet him. He observes

that both adults and toddlers make the "same face," which represents their initial astonishment or uneasiness with his physical attributes. This "same face" describes a subtle yet telling look, perhaps a combination of surprise, interest, or even sympathy.

According to Auggie, children are more open and allow others to see their feelings to more plainly than adults, who may attempt to hide this response out of courtesy. Since people's looks and facial expressions can convey their actual feelings even when they are silent, Auggie's description of these reactions emphasizes the importance of nonverbal communication. The fact that Auggie chose to "look down" indicates how uneasy he is with this nonverbal examination. He tries to protect himself from the criticism and unpleasant looks he receives from these implicit clues by avoiding eye contact. He uses his body language to shield himself from the emotional effects of being observably different, turning away from people and avoiding eye contact. This demonstrates how nonverbal cues like eye contact and facial expressions, which, without using words facilitate body shaming by promoting judgment and otherness. Auggie's family members are also worried of him and they have taken a lot of trouble because of him.

His sister Via encourages her brother, "If they stare, let them stare" (00:27:07). Via reassures Auggie that if people stare at him, it is their problem, not his, and encourages him to embrace his individuality. Her remarks give Auggie the confidence to ignore the looks and not let other people's opinions determine his value. On the other hand, she thinks her brother is the sun and she along with her parents are planets orbiting the sun (00:26:34-00:26:40). In addition to expressing her intense affection for her brother, Via's image of her family revolving around Auggie, with him serving as the sun,

also suggests latent discontent. Because of the care and attention Auggie receives because of his illness, she feels overshadowed, as though people are actively ignoring her. As she negotiates her own identity while staying in the background, this emotional neglect may quietly exacerbate feelings of dissatisfaction or inadequacy, which can occasionally show out as internalized body shaming or problems with self-esteem. Though unsaid, Via's internal discontent is a type of nonverbal body shaming since she struggles in silence with feeling that her brother's wants and appearance take precedence over her own. In addition to body shaming, the root of her dissatisfaction is a family-related dynamic in which her parents have given Auggie's wants more precedence over her. Her demeanour and attitude reflect the strain because she does not express it explicitly. This creates an unseen pressure that gently supports the family's attention on physical distinctions.

The lads' sketches, images, and photographs make fun of Auggie's facial features, which is offensive. These graphic depictions act as harsh reminders of how his peers view him as strange or dangerous. Instead of expressing their discomfort and contempt with words, the lads choose pictures that exaggerate or warp Auggie's looks, turning him into a caricature. Since the photographs convey rejection, mockery, and a lack of understanding for his condition without explicitly



Fig. 4.7. A group photograph of Auggie's class in *Wonder* (00:33:36)

expressing their hurtful aim, their creation and dissemination amount to a type of nonverbal body shaming. When Auggie's class is photographed, he likes to be left out, but the teacher keeps him in the picture (00:33:37). Auggie's unwillingness to be in the

class photo and his conviction that "everyone hates him" highlight the profound emotional toll that nonverbal body shaming takes. He needs to distance himself from others, which is a reflection of his internalized feelings of rejection and discomfort with how other people perceive him because of the silent criticism he receives from his peers.

Even while nobody may say anything directly cruel right now, his friends' lack of affection, acceptance, or attempt to include him sends a powerful, underlying message that he is different and unwanted. *Wonder* highlights Auggie's feeling of estrangement by the forced involvement in the picture, which further distances him from other people's collective gaze. This instance demonstrates how, without saying a word, nonverbal cues like avoidance and exclusion may strongly encourage body shaming. On Auggie's desk, Julian keeps a folded piece of paper. Auggie discovers a picture with his name scribbled alongside Freddy Krueger when he unfolds it. Julian takes a seat and gives him a mocking smirk (01: 26: 23-1:26:31). Julian labels Auggie Freddy Krueger, the villain from the Nightmare on Elm Street horror movies, in the skit. Julian mocks Auggie's facial differences in a brutal way, using Freddy Krueger's famously damaged and malformed visage to reinforce body shaming and painful parallels to something hideous or terrifying.

Julian intentionally uses nonverbal body shaming as he places the folded paper with the image of Auggie compared to Freddy Krueger on his desk. Julian furthers the impression that Auggie's appearance is strange and terrifying by linking him to a monster figure. His sardonic smile adds another dimension of quiet cruelty as he observes Auggie unfolding the paper, demonstrating that he intended the act to cause pain and humiliation. Without saying a word aloud, Julian's silent gesture, the drawing, and the smirk convey

contempt and exclusion throughout the entire discussion, further isolating Auggie through nonverbal clues.

Students are giggling when Julian hangs the class photo on the wall. They are questioning him about Auggie's location in the picture. As Auggie arrives in front of the picture, they depart. He examines the picture in which someone has erased him and he notices the words "No Freaks Allowed" (01:26:55). People use the word "freak" rudely to characterize someone who people think odd, abnormal, or different, frequently because of his or her physical attributes, conduct, or skills. It has a negative meaning and means to demean or insult the one receiving the name by implying that they do not conform to social norms.

By referring to Auggie's facial abnormalities, the term "freak" unfairly implies that he is aberrant or unnatural only because he does not appear like his peers. The phrase reinforces the body shaming he endures by isolating and humiliating him. The words "No Freaks Allowed" written on the picture work as a visual depiction of their rejection, making Auggie feel like an outsider through actions and pictures rather than verbal taunts for his appearance. This scene effectively conveys nonverbal body shaming through mocking and isolation. The fact that Julian posted the group photo with Auggie purposefully removed conveys a clear and unspoken message that Auggie is not welcome. On the other side of the photograph, there is written "Do Everyone A Favor and Die" (01:27:59). Sarah, Julian's mom is responsible for it. As she edits the photo at home, Julian brings it in school, writes the note on the back of the class photo and displays it in school. "Do Everyone A Favor and Die" conveys a profoundly damaging and harsh message, suggesting that Auggie's death would somehow make their lives

better and that his entire presence is a burden to others. By implying that Auggie's existence and appearance are so unpleasant that he does not deserve to live, this kind of language severely hurts people and encourages body shaming.

The film highlights the emotional impact of the nonverbal body shaming he experiences by the textual form of this message, which, despite his friends do not utter aloud, serves as an unavoidable reminder of how other people view him. In front of Julian and his parents, the school principal, Mr. Tushman, displays numerous other notes, drawings, and photographs that his classmates affixed to Auggie's desk, chair, and locker. Mr. Tushman demonstrates that bullying is not limited to verbal or physical abuse; it also includes cruel gestures, pictures, and exclusion, all of which can have a significant emotional effect on the victim. By presenting these damaging messages, he hopes to challenge the students' conduct, make them realize the hurt they have caused, and encourage an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance in its place. The present incident represents a major turning point and highlights the need of addressing nonverbal bullying in schools.

Body Shaming by Symbols

Makers employ symbols in movies to convey emotion, complexity, and meaning without telling the whole tale aloud. They are also parts of non-verbal cues, but I have excluded them from non-verbal group because of their different identification. They aid in subtly expressing themes, character feelings, or messages, which helps the viewer, reflect and relate to the movie's concepts more. Gillian Rose argues that symbolic signs do not establish an inherent relationship between the sign and what it represents, but rather rely on accepted meanings. She further states, "Symbolic signs have a

conventionalized but clearly arbitrary relation between signifier and signified” (78). The meaning of a red traffic light, for instance, is "stop," but this is a learned rule and not something that happens naturally. This demonstrates how society shapes symbols and how their meaning can evolve over time.

These films use many symbols such as tools, objects and activities to reflect and indicate body shaming. *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* shows Sandhya's baggy attire as a body-shaming symbol, emphasizing how society forces people to adhere to ideals of beauty. Sandhya frequently dons loose clothing throughout the movie, which both hides her form and reflects her body anxieties. This outfit decision implies that a person's value is correlated with how she looks, symbolizing society's propensity to minimize people who do not meet the limited standards of beauty. Her enormous clothes are a common visual cue, especially when she is interacting with others. This reinforces the internalized body shaming she suffers and highlights the stigma associated with her size. The audiences



Fig. 4.8. Sandhya's attire in *Dum Laga ke Haisha* (00:04:44)

take the bride Sandhya's dance as a moment of joy and self-expression, contrasting sharply with Prem's disdainful perspective. This scene is a little different from the previous one. When Sandhya dances, her movements are lively and filled with enthusiasm, displaying her confidence and love for the art. Rather than judging his

passion, Prem hates her performance through the prism of his own insecurities and

societal prejudices against body size. His internalized prejudices cause him to perceive his dancing as awkward or inappropriate, which intensifies his hatred and embarrassment.

This juxtaposition highlights how Sandhya's attempts to accept herself and enjoy life encounter Prem's negative attitude, illustrating how societal pressures and body shaming can cause rifts in personal relationships. As a result, Sandhya's dance and her other activities which were meant to celebrate her individuality, become a further source of alienation for Prem, deepening his resentment and highlighting the destructive impact body shaming has on their marriage. When Prem's relatives see Sandhya dancing, they make fun of her (00:10:25). Then, her mom stops her from dancing (00:10:41). The rituals start and Sandhya sits together with Prem.

In *Wonder*, symbols play a subtle yet powerful role in conveying body shaming. Auggie's space helmet (00:01:13), for instance, is a symbol of his desire to hide from the world due to the shame and discomfort he feels about his appearance. This shot is a low-angle



Fig. 4.9. Auggie's space helmet scene from *Wonder* (00:01:15)

shot that makers have taken from below the subject's eye level, making the subject appear larger than life. The helmet represents a shield, both literally and figuratively, allowing him to avoid the stares and judgments of others. It serves as a barrier that shields him from the surface-level responses of the outside world, representing how body-shamed people frequently feel compelled to hide who they really are. The moment Auggie decides to take off the helmet (00:03:49) symbolizes his journey towards self-acceptance,

showing that overcoming body shaming requires confronting societal pressures and reclaiming one's identity.

Auggie's facemask is another significant symbol in *Wonder* that represents body shaming. In order to hide his face and escape the looks and criticism of others, Auggie dons a mask on Halloween (01:44:39-01:45:10). The mask symbolizes his wish to conceal his physical distinctions as well as the psychological suffering brought on by others perceiving him as "different." It acts as a barrier to shelter him from the harsh realities of bullying and social rejection. The mask also represents mental struggle Auggie has between wanting to fit in and feeling self-conscious about his appearance. The mask changes during the movie from being a tool for concealment to representing Auggie's path to self-acceptance. His decision to take off the mask and confront his peers at the end of the narrative symbolizes his bravery in embracing his identity and opposing the stigma associated with body shaming. This metamorphosis highlights the identity, acceptance, and the value of staying true to oneself in spite of social pressures and criticisms.

Auggie stands by the body of water, sobbing as he reflects on his experiences and emotions (1:37:05 – 01:37:40). This moment of vulnerability symbolizes the weight of the body shaming and bullying he has faced throughout his life, illustrating the deep emotional toll it has taken on him. We can see the tears he sheds as a release of all the pent-up sadness, fear, and frustration that he has accumulated due to societal judgments about his appearance. As he cries, his friends come to console him, representing the support and love he has found despite the challenges. The body of water itself can symbolize a turning point; just as water flows and cleanses, Auggie's tears signify a

cleansing of past pain. The moment foreshadows a transition in his life, suggesting that with the release of his emotions, he is moving toward a happier, more accepting time in his journey of self-discovery and friendship. Similarly, the firecracker celebration (1:37:48) symbolizes the joy that has blossomed in Auggie's heart as he begins to embrace his identity and find acceptance among his friends. As they joyfully sit together, shouting and having fun, the firecrackers serve as a metaphor for the explosive happiness and freedom he feels after overcoming the emotional burdens of body shaming.

The "wife carrying" competition (1:34:33–1:43:36) embodies the social constraints associated with weight and physical beauty and is a powerful symbol of body shaming in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*. The weighing scale frames the competition, serving as a continual reminder of Sandhya's size and about how society perceives her value in proportion to her physical appearance. Prem's battle to carry Sandhya during the marathon serves as a reminder of the psychological and physical strain that society places on people. The visual juxtaposition of other, lighter women readily being carried by their lovers further reinforces the idea that conventional beauty standards determine not just romantic desirability but also social acceptance.

In the end, the competition causes Prem and Sandhya to undergo a transformation. The contest transforms into a place for development and acceptance as Prem faces his assumptions and comes to value Sandhya for who she is rather than how she seems. His triumph serves as a metaphor for overcoming social norms and demonstrates the superiority of love and fortitude over snap decisions. He confronts his prejudices as he raises Sandhya, implying a path toward love and acceptance that transcends snap decisions. Sandhya's participation in the competition is a sign of empowerment; she

defies accepted ideas of value and exhibits strength by actively joining them on their quest. With this victory, she overcomes Prem's initial misunderstandings and is now able to "rule" their relationship as a confident woman who challenges social expectations.

Body Shaming at Shots

Walter Benjamin states, "For the film, what matters primarily is that the actor represents himself to the public before the camera, rather than representing someone else" (10). Photography and video, two examples of contemporary technology, have changed how we view and interact with art. In the past, art was distinct and associated with a particular location, such as a well-known picture at a museum. According to Benjamin, actors in films show themselves to the audience directly through the camera rather than merely acting out a part as if they would in a play. Instead of merely posing as someone else, the camera catches their motions and facial expressions in a way that makes them a part of the movie.

Benjamin adds that films provide us a fresh perspective on commonplace objects and help us comprehend the forces that influence our life by using close-ups and highlighting hidden variations. They also open our eyes to new ideas and methods of interacting with the outside world (15). The term "mechanical reproduction," which he used, refers to the process of creating copies of art or items using machines, such as printing photographs, creating films, or replicating paintings, so that many people can view them rather than just one original. Gillian Rose discusses that a specific shot depicts the shot distance, which is the amount of a figure shown. A shot can be full, three-quarters; medium, head and shoulders, close-up, or an extreme long shot, in which case the figure is in the distant distance (49). In *Wonder*, makers have employed various

camera angles and shots to visualize the theme of body shaming and Auggie's experiences.

One notable technique is the use of close-ups during moments of vulnerability, particularly when Auggie faces bullying or feels self-conscious. For instance, when he first enters the school and meets with stares, the camera captures his expressions in tight close-ups, revealing his emotional turmoil and the weight of societal judgment (00:14:15-00:14:55). These intimate shots draw the audience into Auggie's perspective, allowing viewers to feel his discomfort and isolation. Additionally, the contrasting wide shots that

display Auggie standing apart from his peers further highlight his feelings of being an outsider. The combination of



these angles serves to illustrate the impact of body shaming on

Fig. 4.10. *Wonder* (00:14:24): Auggie enters in the school compound

Auggie's self-esteem and emotional well-being, ultimately fostering empathy for his character. In this film, the use of close-up shots when Julian gives Auggie a note filled with cruel sketches (01:26:29) is a powerful visual technique to amplify the emotional weight of the moment. By zooming in on the sketches, the camera forces the audience to focus on the harshness of the drawings, which depict Auggie in a mocking and dehumanizing way.

As the visual insult becomes inevitable and excessive, this close-up enables audiences to experience the severity of Julian's abuse on a more intimate level.

Additionally, it highlights Auggie's fragility because the meticulous attention to detail in

the sketches highlights how very personal and painful these representations are for him. The close-up shot makes the body shaming explicit, translating Julian's cruelty into a visual assault that enhances the emotional impact of the scene.

In the same way, Manu Anand, the winner of the Best Cinematography award at the 61st Filmfare Awards, has artistically rolled his camera in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*. This film strategically employs camera angles and shots to visually reinforce the theme of body shaming, particularly as it relates to Sandhya's character. For example, makers have used a medium shot to show Sandhya's loose outfit (fig. 4.8) that can also highlight Sandhya's emotion and body language. When Sandhya is shown wearing oversized clothing (00:04:39), medium shots capture her body language and posture, highlighting her insecurities and discomfort. The cinematographer has angled camera such a way that



Fig. 4.11. *Dum Laga ke Haisha* (1:39:58): Prem carries Sandhya for the competition

the audience can see her from the waist up. By placing the character in the deteriorated environment and capturing her feelings, the medium shot in this scene may reflect the character's emotional state or the tone of the story (00:04:44).

Additionally, this visual storytelling reinforces the stigma surrounding her size while also contrasting with moments of empowerment as her character evolves. During the “Dum Laga Ke Haisha” competition (fig. 4.11), the makers utilize low-angle shots of Prem struggling to carry Sandhya, which not only emphasizes his physical exertion but also symbolizes the societal pressure surrounding her body image. They juxtapose these

shots with wider frames of wedding ceremony that reveal the reactions of the audience, displaying the judgments and expectations placed on both characters. Here, the strategic use of camera angles effectively conveys the complexities of body shaming, ultimately inviting viewers to reflect on the importance of acceptance and love beyond physical appearances. In order to convey the larger context, it employs a wide (or long) shot, displaying not just Sandhya dancing but also the surrounding crowd and environment of the marriage ceremony.



Fig. 4.12. *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (00:10:26): Sandhya dances as a bride

In order to highlight her happiness and movement while preserving the joyful mood, the camera positions her within the bigger wedding scene. In this film, close-up shots similarly capture non-verbal cues that convey body shaming, especially during Prem and Sandhya's wedding ceremony. The camera focuses on the bitter and disapproving expressions of Prem's relative Nirmal as he looks at Sandhya's fuller body (fig. 4.13).



Fig. 4.13. Nirmal's dissatisfaction at Sandhya in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (00: 10:55)

These tight shots show their judgmental reactions—the pursing of lips, raised eyebrows, and disgusted glances without needing explicit dialogue. Such visual cues emphasize how society silently but harshly criticizes Sandhya for her weight, further underscoring the theme of body shaming through visual storytelling.

The Defeat of Body Shaming

Wonder depicts the art of body shaming through a mix of emotional storytelling and relatable character experiences that resonate with the audience. There are four narrators in this film: Auggie, Via, Jack Will and Miranda. The film cleverly balances moments of humour and light-heartedness with poignant scenes that illustrate the challenges Auggie faces due to his appearance. The film uses four narrators to offer a variety of viewpoints on Auggie's experiences, especially with regard to body shaming.

By displaying his interactions with friends and family, viewers can enjoy the warmth of genuine connections while empathizing with his struggles. As previously stated, the film's utilization of humorous dialogue and positive moments enables viewers to follow along with the story without the body-shaming topic overpowering them. Ultimately, *Wonder* delivers a powerful message that body shaming is harmful, framing Auggie's journey as a triumph over adversity. By the end, the victory of Auggie encourages viewers to embrace kindness and acceptance, reinforcing the notion that everyone deserves love and respect regardless of their differences.

In the same vein, *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* presents the art of body shaming in a way that combines humour with heartfelt moments, allowing the audience to connect with the characters' journeys. The film skilfully uses comedic elements, particularly through Prem's initial reluctance and his exaggerated perceptions of beauty, to create relatable situations that evoke laughter while also addressing serious issues. As viewers watch Sandhya negotiate societal judgments and ultimately assert her worth, they can enjoy the lighter moments without losing sight of the underlying message. The narrative illustrates the detrimental portrayal of body shaming, resulting in periods of introspection and

development for both Prem and Sandhya. By the film's conclusion, the makers defeat and erase body shaming as the characters learn to embrace themselves and each other, promoting the idea that true beauty comes from within. This encourages audiences to reject negative stereotypes and foster a more compassionate view of individuals whom others perceive as "different," creating a more inclusive and understanding society.

Chapter V

Interpretation and Analysis

Body Shaming and the Culture Industry

Adele Zeynep Walton argues that racial capitalism encourages people to rank and examine their own and other people's value based on fictitious notions associated with physical appearance. She emphasizes how the modern beauty and fashion industry still intricately link to Eurocentric beauty ideals that have their roots in colonialism (par. 4). Although there are many causes that promote body shaming, at its core, it is an expression of culture industry. As an economic system, capitalism puts consumption and profit ahead of the welfare of the person. It encourages a culture of comparison and rivalry in which people are under continual pressure to live up to idealized notions of perfection and beauty.

The film industry often imposes these unrealistic and unreasonable standards on most individuals. The culture industry fosters an environment where people feel pressured to aim for an unattainable ideal, which results in feelings of shame and inadequacy, by sustaining the notion that one's value directly relates to their physical appearance. Furthermore, the beauty business makes money by pushing unattainable beauty standards and marketing goods that claim to improve looks. People constantly get messages, which creates a vicious cycle of insecurity and dissatisfaction.

In *The Body in Late-Capitalist USA*, Donald M. Lowe makes the case that our bodies are intricately linked to the social and economic systems of late capitalism and are more than just physical objects (2). He argues that the activities of production, consumption, social reproduction, gender construction and sexuality shape and constrain

our bodily demands and their satisfactions. These behaviours have been more and more commercialized in late capitalism, which has caused our physical needs to change to meet the requirements of flexible accumulation. This implies that the logic of profit and consumption is having a greater and greater impact on how we meet our needs, from food and shelter to leisure and self-expression.

According to Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the cultural industry greatly influences people's experiences and consciousness. Their text *The Cultural Industry* describes how the culture business shapes people's perceptions and interactions with the world around them by producing a world that is indistinguishable from reality through its many forms, such as movies and radio shows (184). Techniques used by the media industry, like mechanical duplication and the construction of a continuous extension of the universe, are intended to limit the spontaneity and imagination of the audience. Because something conditions people to passively, consume and accept the cultural items offered to them, this ultimately results in the uniformity and homogenization of thought and perception. In the words of Adorno and Horkheimer, the culture business is an instrument of power rather than just the art of the consumer. They assert that the culture industry is a company that creates cultural goods primarily for financial gain and status quo preservation.

As a component of the cultural industry, makers make movies to uphold the status quo and thwart real social change (185). The culture business makes sure that people continue to be passive consumers rather than critical thinkers by reiterating the prevailing worldview and influencing consumer consciousness. As a by-product of the cultural industry, films, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, makers make films to uphold

capitalist principles and values, including romanticized ideas of beauty and attractiveness. They argue that movies often depict stereotypical physical traits like being muscular, thin, or conventionally attractive, which can reinforce cultural standards of beauty. Through the imposition of irrational expectations, the media's promotion of idealized beauty standards encourages consumerism and body image problems.

Immanuel Kant argues in *Critique of Judgment* that when someone likes something without personal interest, s/he believes everyone should like it as well (54). This is because pleasure stems from something universally present in others, not individual inclinations or conditions. A pure judgment of taste, devoid of interest, claims universal validity. Kant's "subjective universality" stems from the conviction that human sensibilities are universal and from the individual's free will. When films push one idea of beauty, leading to body shaming of those who look different, it stops us from freely deciding what we find beautiful, which is the opposite of what Kant thought we should be able to do when we judge beauty.

Susan Sontag talks about how the concept of beauty has evolved throughout time in response to the culture industry's manufactured wants (211). At first, people viewed beauty as a harmonious, good idea. However, people slowly started to perceive beauty as a negative, constrictive idea as society grew more innovative and began to challenge conventional standards. These days, society frequently views beauty as something that is only interesting or superficial. Sontag argues that while beauty can offer certain privileges, it also comes with limitations and expectations. People see beauty as a woman's primary source of power and attractiveness, but this focus can be detrimental, as it reduces women to their physical appearance and limits their potential. Sontag

emphasizes the double-edged sword of beauty, highlighting the societal pressure on women to conform to unrealistic beauty standards and the negative consequences of this pursuit.

In *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, while society initially judges Sandhya based on her unconventional appearance, the film ultimately challenges societal beauty standards and celebrates her inner beauty. Sandhya's character demonstrates that a woman's worth and value extend far beyond her physical appearance. Her intelligence, resilience, and determination are far more important than her weight or physical attractiveness. The film's message aligns with Sontag's critique of the societal pressure on women to conform to unrealistic beauty ideals and the detrimental effects of this pursuit. Sandhya's attempts to change her looks like makeup, clothes, jewellery, or any physical improvements does not win Prem over. Instead, her inner feelings and self-evaluation, particularly her unwavering love and desire to win him over despite his flaws like failing his tenth-grade exams, being jobless, and his family's economic crisis, ultimately made him love her.

The Culture Industry in *Wonder*

Wonder examines the culture industry promotes narrow beauty standards that contribute to body shaming. This film first portrays Auggie's disabled face as a major issue, highlighting the extent to which our culture cherishes flawless appearances that the film industry has promoted. Despite its apparent message inner beauty is important, the film may lead us to believe that the issue solely relates to the kindness or cruelty of specific individuals. This conceals how films persuade us to all aspire to the same standard of beauty, which benefits businesses and maintains injustice for minority groups. Being tall, having a well-defined body, possessing symmetrical facial features,

and generally looking well are all common components of the traditional definition of handsomeness. Most of the films frequently depict typical heroes as tall, attractive, and skilled fighters who win both love and battles, projecting an air of attractiveness and strength. Auggie's facial weakness prevents him from having such stereotypically heroic traits in this movie.

Auggie studies in a school named Beecher Prep School. According to *Wonder Wikia*, it is a private middle school of North River Height, New York, USA. The film does not explicitly state this, but the school's appearance and resources suggest a higher level of funding than a typical public school. The classrooms are well-equipped (00:34:41), and the school has a dedicated support staff (00:34:34). Additionally, the school's focus on social emotional learning and inclusion programs aligns with the values often found in private schools. Auggie's family's socioeconomic status and access to resources play a significant role. They can afford to send him to a prestigious private school.

Glenn Rikowski states that the capitalization of educational institutions and services—education turning into capital—is the foundation of the politics of educational (or any other type of) privatization, which is all about making money. It has to do with educational capitalist development. Therefore, it is also insufficient to begin discussions about educational privatization by breaking it down into its primary forms in order to understand the fundamental aspect of privatization, which is the conversion of public funds into private profit (40). From a culture industry viewpoint, Auggie's private schooling shows how even "inclusive" education becomes a paid privilege, reinforcing

capitalist inequality. This commodification of education, driven by profit, normalizes disparities and distracts from the systemic issues that create unequal access.

Capitalist beauty standards foster body shaming, which forces people like Olivia (Via) to fit in even when they do not. Via unexpectedly fills Miranda's role in the school production of *Our Town* in the *Wonder* play scene (1:19:09–1:22:49). Organizers compel Via to conform conventional beauty standards in spite of her hurried preparations and discontent, which reflects the play's nuanced criticism of capitalism's impact on looks. This instance highlights how beauty standards affect people's self-esteem and confidence even in artistic contexts. Eurocentric beauty standards promote features such as thin lips, light skin, tiny noses, and straight or wavy hair, often in lighter tones. They also prefer slender body shapes, which marginalizes other forms of attractiveness.

The pressure from society to adhere to Eurocentric beauty standards—which are frequently reinforced by capitalist notions of perfection and beauty—is reflected in Via's need to straighten her hair. Since her brother, Auggie gets all the attention, Via feels neglected and invisible in her family, as evidenced by Justin. Olivia highlights her emotional distance from her family by asserting that she is an only child (00:29:40–00:29:43), which is an internalized form of irritation and a need for attention. She demonstrates her underlying resentment and discontent in this instance, which also highlights how her mother's attention to Auggie influenced Olivia's sense of self-worth and familial ties (00:31:33–00:32:09). She feels lonely; dissatisfied and so does Auggie because of culture industry. Auggie faces challenges and discriminations because of his facial deformity. This reflects how capitalism values individuals.

The "gaze" in fashion shows promotes a narrow beauty ideal; contributing to body shaming that can exclude those like Auggie who do not fit this standard and dislike being "gazed" at. Basia Sliwinska writes, "Woman is constrained by the phallic male gaze when it comes to her body, her role in society and in the economy (and as such the labour market) and also her participation in politics (25)." We can apply her argument about the phallic male gaze to the context of fashion shows. In many fashion shows, organizers present the models' bodies in a way that caters to male desire, often objectifying and sexualizing them. We can see this objectification in the way the models pose, dress, and present, reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

The focus on physical appearance and attractiveness can limit how viewers/society perceive and value women, reducing them to their bodies rather than recognizing their intellectual and personal qualities. Audrey Millet notes that fashion is deserving of its negative image. Each day, it affects media, jobs, bank accounts, behavior, and urban planning (180). Since Viewers can admire Auggie's character in *Wonder* more for his inner attributes and personality than for his outward appearance, we can argue that his portrayal challenges the phallic male gaze. The assumption that beauty is a commodity for capitalist success marginalizes people who do not fit the financial criteria of the industry and perpetuates created ideals.

By encouraging people to strive for frequently unachievable beauty, this system deflects attention from structural injustices and strengthens the cultural industry's hold on defining and commercializing value. Systems like capitalism can foster a culture of unequal treatment and prejudice based on physical appearance. *Wonder* also highlights how capitalism, through the cultural business, commercializes even celebrations like

Halloween, Christmas, and New Year's. These festivals create chances for businesses to market themed items, pushing consumption and raising revenue, thereby reducing cultural traditions to mere occasions for profit generation.

The culture industry, through the promotion of branded items connected to beauty and money, contributes to body shaming by promoting material things as markers of attractiveness and social value. Vivian suggests “normal” customs for Auggie fearing judgment and ridicule. It successfully illustrates how the film represents capitalist principles by drawing attention to the emphasis on brand names and the need to live up to social beauty standards. Julian's pricey attire and the students' comments on having the "Latest Nikes" highlight how significant material belongings and brand prestige are in capitalist cultures. Inequality may result from this, and people may feel under pressure to live up to these expectations in order for others to appreciate and accept them.

The desire to fit in and the fear of social rejection are prevalent themes in capitalist society, and Vivian's advice to Auggie to embrace "normal" practices emphasizes these ideas. People may give up their uniqueness and originality because of this pressure to fit in in order to satisfy others' expectations. The characters' desires fit to Adorno and Horkheimer's argument that the culture industry creates a sense of false consciousness, where individuals internalize and accept dominant ideologies without question. The emphasis on brand names and physical appearance in *Wonder* reflects the “capitalist values promoted by the culture industry” (119). The characters' desire to own the latest fashion trends and conform to societal beauty standards highlights the pressure to consume and the importance placed on external appearance in capitalist societies.

In this way, we can apply Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry's focus on profit and superficiality to the way they have portrayed fashion in *Wonder*. Viewers can notice the film's emphasis on brand names and physical appearance as a reflection of the capitalist values that prioritize consumption and external validation. They argue that in a capitalist society, commercial interests and the pursuit of profit often dictate beauty and fashion. We can see it in the way that fashion trends are constantly changing and influenced by advertising, leading to a culture of consumerism and superficiality.

Ultimately, the culture industry has significantly influenced the film characters' bodies, fashion choices, education, notions of beauty, attire, involvement in drama, and haircuts. Consumption, compliance to social norms, and the emphasis on physical perfection can all contribute to pressure and inequity, which can result in problems with body image, fewer educational chances, and a preference for appearance over content.

The Culture Industry in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*

Dum Laga Ke Haisha is the story of a young man named Prem Prakash Tiwari, who owns a videocassette store in the Haridwar local market, and is a member of a nationalist group and Sandhya Verma, a girl who is doing her bachelors of Education to get a teacher's job. Prem is a 25-year-old Haridwar resident who left school after having failed his tenth grade exam. In this film, the culture industry quietly shapes how society views value and beauty, which eventually results in body shaming. The drama, which takes place in the 1990s, centers on Prem, a guy who feels compelled by social and cultural expectations to live up to an idealized standard of success, marriage, and beauty.

The society evaluates people on their capacity to meet market-driven standards of attractiveness in addition to their beauty as consumerism and capitalism continue to influence social expectations. Because Sandhya, Prem's wife, does not fit the traditional, commercially pushed ideal of beauty, this pressure takes the form of body shaming. The movie reveals the deeper, frequently disregarded connection between economic systems and body shaming by exposing how capitalism values, which are based on comparison and competition—contribute to the stigmatization of those who do not fit these ideals. We can see Prem in his tiny audio/video cassette store in the first scene of *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, trying hard to sell goods in a market with little apparent demand (00:01:15). Despite his efforts, the store does not have many clients, which emphasizes his low financial strain. Nirmal's father, by establishing a store in the same market where Prem sells compact discs, obviously affects Prem's family business.

According to culture industry viewpoint, large multinationals and contemporary technologies dominate this competitive, consumer-focused market, making little businesses like Prem seem unimportant. His financial troubles serve as evidence of this. Prem worries about this lack of success since it demonstrates how this system routinely disregards those who are unable to keep up. Since he feels like a failure, he later adopts a different perspective on marriage and beauty, which relates to the body-shaming subject of the movie. Adorno and Horkheimer analyse how the culture industry reduces individuals to mere statistical data, categorizing them by income groups to predict and manipulate their consumption habits (97). This process reflects the dehumanization inherent in commercialization, as commercial entities treat people not as unique

individuals with creative or personal preferences but as market segments to target for profit.

By equating this categorization with political propaganda, they emphasize the systematic nature of this manipulation and its broader societal impact. They state that since individual preferences and inventiveness are subservient to market pressures, this commercialization dehumanizes both the creators and consumers of culture. Their description of alienation, in which capitalist mechanisms define success and societal ideals, indirectly affecting body shaming and personal worth. The demise of conventional communication methods constrains this suffering.

Prem's decision to dress in Western clothing while Sandhya is dressed in traditional Indian garb during their first encounter (00:04:13–00:07:00) serves as a subtle example of the artificial divisions that the culture business in a capitalist system maintains. This visual contrast suggests appearance pressures that feed body shaming. In a capitalistic environment, where Western ideals frequently stand for prosperity and progress and traditional clothing for cultural heritage and identity, this contrast illustrates the conflict between modernity and tradition.

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the seeming variety in consumer goods is mostly a delusion because standardized and ostensibly varied items ultimately serve the capitalist system (97). This concept also applies to clothing, fashion, where trends and labels may appear distinctive, yet the same factors standardize manufacturing, and consumption influence them. As Prem tries to win over Sandhya and her family, we can see his Western attire as an attempt to conform to contemporary, capitalist ideals that place a premium on independence and financial success. On the other hand, Sandhya's

traditional clothing indicates the cultural demands placed on women to exemplify familial and societal norms.

Given that women are under social pressure to maintain traditional norms and men like Prem are frequently pushed to embrace new and wider patterns in order to project status and desirability, this paradox implies that capitalism affects both gender roles and consumer decisions. The scene serves as an example of how culture industry affects men and women, reaffirming the idea that outward appearances correlate value and the capacity to adapt to changing market-driven standards.

Similarly, the culture industry's influence is evident in the visual clash between Sandhya's traditional outfit and Prem's Western attire, highlighting the story's main theme of the conflict between tradition and modernity. This is consistent with the argument made by Susan Sontag in *On Photography* that pictures (or visual symbols) not only depict reality but also influence how society views and interacts with it (2). Prem and Sandhya are interacting with cultural norms by playing these roles, which gives these fashion choices authority. Prem's Western clothing represents the aspiration for upward mobility, whereas Sandhya's traditional garb represents Indian cultural expectations for women. Both characters are "photographed" into their roles by society, with their attire serving as a symbol of the societal norms that are thrust upon them. Sontag contends that commodified imagery distorts women's sense of self by pressuring them to fit in. Social conventions and commercialized imagery have influenced these visual cues, which can reinforce body shaming and internalized appearance pressures.

In *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, a family member suggests that Sandhya will work as a teacher and make a financial contribution in her home because of her degree (00:08:26).

Capitalism commodifies women like Sandhya, which drives their education for financial gain. They have to strike a balance between traditional family roles and financial output. Prem's marriage occurs at a Samuhik Vivah (Group Marriage Ceremony) (00:08:59-00:11:40), which is indicative of a capitalistic society that values efficiency and cost cutting over individualism. The usage of identity numbers for couples demonstrates the commodification of marriage, which turns a meaningful life event into a transactional experience. The image demonstrates how capitalism has influenced societal ideals surrounding weddings, transforming them into consumerism-driven public spectacles as brides and grooms concentrate on controlling their appearance and taking pictures.

For Prem's identification, a ceremonial participant posts the number 18 on a badge. The number 18 badge represents an example of how societal economic actions in capitalism culture weaken individual marriage identities. We can link the numbering in the wedding ceremony of Prem and Sandhya to Guy Debord's argument in *The Society of the Spectacle*, which highlights how capitalist mechanisms mediate personal identities. He states, "The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images" (2). In this instance, the number turns marriage into a capitalism-driven performance by reducing Prem's individuality. Similar to the mass-produced cultural objects Adorno and Horkheimer describe, this standardized component turns a singular, personal experience into a measurable transaction, illustrating the instrumental rationality of the capitalist system and its widespread influence through the culture business.

The "wife carrying" competition (1:34:33–1:43:36) which is also depicted as "Dum Laga ke Haisha competition" becomes a metaphor for the influence of culture

industry. As described, this event exemplifies the commodification and objectification of women in a spectacle consistent with capitalist ideals. The race reinforces the idea of women as players in a performance driven by the market rather than as unique individuals by reducing them to their physical characteristics (weight, age), and by associating their worth with the amount of reward. The event further reinforces how culture industry uses even interpersonal dynamics as a platform for entertainment and product promotion by linking human relationships to consumerism.

Prem is motivated to take part because he wants to improve his family's financial situation when their business fails, underscoring the difficulties associated with unstable finances in a capitalist society. Several couples rehearse for the competition on the playgrounds (1:25:03) highlights how the desire for success is commodified—winning is closely associated with financial gain and social acceptance. This moment demonstrates the destructive connection of interpersonal ties with capitalist needs, even in the middle of the possibly beautiful ending. Prem's financial success and acceptance of Sandhya highlight how economic pressures influence even close relationships, implying that market success validates their union. Sandhya's obesity, which has been the subject of constant mockery due to the capitalist commodification of body types and the imposition of unachievable beauty standards, serves as a clear example of how the culture industry upholds hierarchies based on appearance, which leads directly to body shaming.

Beauty Ideals Fuel Body Shaming

Wonder and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* both examine how culture industry, which entwines with films, influences how society views success, attractiveness, and self-worth, contributing to the practice of body shaming. Auggie's facial peculiarities in *Wonder*

subvert the reel-based beauty standards, exposing how society frequently places a premium on looks, mirroring capitalist notions of perfection. Similar to how film industry promotes thinness as the ideal, Sandhya's weight is also vulnerable to social judgment in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*. This, through mass deception, encourages consumer-driven businesses that profit from weight-loss products and body shaming.

Adorno claims that the culture sector purposefully incorporates its customers from above. The greater the emphasis placed on the mass manufacturing process, the more successfully it can close the gap between the produced and consumed object (98). Both films reflect standardized goals such as beauty standards, body-size standards and success and self-worth through movie-promoted societal norms, which promote adherence to preconceived ideas of beauty. This illustrates how, as Adorno explains, the culture business commodifying cultures suppresses individuality and upholds capitalist ideals by making money out of fears like Sandhya's weight and Auggie's appearance.

The film-driven capitalist culture in both movies creates irrational expectations by associating one's own worth with outward appearance and market-driven standards. By influencing consumer preferences and bolstering the notion that consumption propels advancement and happiness, the media plays a crucial part in advancing capitalism. The film industry continuously bombards people with messages that link material things to success, prestige, and personal fulfilment through advertising, product placement, and carefully chosen content. A culture of consumerism may result from this, where people feel compelled to buy products and services in order to meet social norms and preserve their feeling of value. Furthermore, the culture industry that is a part of film frequently minimizes the injustices and unfavorable effects of uncontrolled capitalism growth,

portraying it as a system that benefits everyone. This artificial drive for success and beauty, which is essential to the film industry's function in the culture industry, directly leads to body shaming by devaluing nonconformity.

In *Wonder*, characters encourage body shaming through their excessive interest in film-shaped beauty ideals. Julian's passion with upholding a "cool" and handsome persona is evident in his interactions and conduct throughout the film, which is consistent with reel-based ideas of appearance-based self-worth. Julian, for example, frequently criticizes Auggie's appearance and tries to establish his social dominance, demonstrating his devotion to traditional values shaped by consumer society. These behaviours point to an underlying desire to fit in with society's ideals of fame and attractiveness. In addition to encouraging users to present ideal versions of themselves, social media also generates demand for goods and services that support this image, whether they be in the form of technology, fashion, or cosmetics. Julian's drive to seem pretty and socially acceptable in this scenario serves as a reminder of how the film industry shapes people to fit into moulds that benefit capitalist businesses.

Similarly, Charlotte tells that she acts in TV commercials (00:6:47), demonstrating the way that even young children are exposed to and impacted by media-driven standards of success and beauty, which reinforce consumerist goals from a young age. She continues that she was in the chorus of *Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular* (00:7:33). This demonstrates the profound impact that the media and entertainment industries have on the development of young people's brains and aspirations. Children's comparisons of one another to characters from movies and television shows, such as Auggie to Darth Sidious from *Star Wars*, highlight the extent to

which media culture influences identity and social interactions. Characters from well-known series, like *Star Wars*, influence children's perceptions and relationships with one another. This analogy, which has its roots in cinematic portrayals, demonstrates how the entertainment industries of capitalism produce well-known characters that influence ideas of normalcy, beauty, and villainy.

Additionally, film representation often perpetuates narrow definitions of beauty, reinforcing the belief that physical appearance is a significant determinant of self-worth. In the same way, the fight scenes of *Wonder* (1:08:59–1:09:29 and 1:35:13–1:35:52) resemble the stylish clashes in Hollywood action movies with celebrities like Chris Evans of *Captain America: The First Avenger* and Tom Cruise of *Mission: Impossible*. These boys, whom the media and film business has influenced, imitate the heroics and exaggerated physicality that these films exalt, demonstrating how Hollywood moulds their ideas of bravery and handling conflict. This effect demonstrates how the media propagates ideas of strength, bravery, and dominance through the sale of consumer goods including action-themed stuff, branded apparel, and toys.

Prem's incessant listening to Kumar Sanu's music in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (00:01:17- 0:01:55), serves as a stark reminder of how movies perpetuate capitalist ideas that lead to body shaming. Popular playback singer Kumar Sanu, who rose to fame in the 1990s, embodies a certain time of idealized love and beauty standards propagated by Bollywood movies and music. Prem is a fan of his songs. These songs quietly promote cultural expectations of how people, especially women, should look and behave so that society will love and accept them. They frequently depict idealized relationships and flawless physical appearances. The extent to which movies shape individual choices and

perceptions, influencing what is considered attractive or appropriate in relationships, is demonstrated by Prem's obsession with these songs and his father's joke about Kumar Sanu (00:32:17). The film quietly criticizes how the film industry upholds limited notions of beauty that support capitalist sectors like fashion, fitness, and beauty, which profit from catering to people who do not meet these criteria.

An excellent illustration of how film, a vital component of this industry, perpetuates socially imposed standards of beauty is Prem's first rejection of Sandhya due to her strange body type. Sandhya's exploitation of these film-driven aspirations demonstrates how the cultural industry establishes unrealistic standards that promote body shaming and furthers capitalist goals through companies that take advantage of these anxieties. The prevalent depictions of these ideas in movies, which reinforce prejudices in popular culture, have an impact on Prem's viewpoint. He has unconsciously assessed her appearance by internalizing these ideals, which has caused his first prejudice. This demonstrates how the film industry has a significant influence on societal norms and how those norms can affect people's relationships and sense of self. Thus, the culture industry's film-driven beauty standards exacerbate Prem's initial prejudice, reinforcing body shaming and driving consumption through the system's active promotion of beauty standards.

Reel-based images of actors and actresses have fuelled both Prem and his father's perceptions of relationships and beauty, contributing to Prem's body shaming of Sandhya due to her weight. According to Prem's father, Prem aspires to marry someone like Juhi Chawla (00:07:48), a well-known Bollywood actress renowned for her charm and traditional beauty. This remark demonstrates how Prem and his father have both

assimilated film industry-shaped ideals of beauty. Bollywood has established limited beauty standards that prioritize physical perfection and slimness, making them the standard for desirability through its glitzy depictions of women like Juhi Chawla. Cinema-fuelled beauty standards cause Prem to reject Sandhya. The fact that even his father, who berates Prem, quietly admits how these cinema representations have influenced their opinions and aspirations shows how much media affects interpersonal relationships and upholds the capitalist ideals of beauty that fuel sectors like fashion and weight reduction.

Sandhya also has a strong personal connection to films and entertainment, especially music, as seen by her desire for Prem to complete her list of favourite songs that she has written down and stored on the table (00:32:43). This implies that filmy music significantly shape her feelings, tastes, and sense of self. The film industry heavily influences Sandhya's love of music through which she finds emotional comfort and a way to express herself. She tries to establish a connection with Prem by sharing her playlist, demonstrating how Bollywood music influences romantic expectations and promotes intimacy. She tells Prem's aunty that Prem is not Vinod Khanna (00:44:50), so he cannot be handsome. This inner feeling shows Sandhya's interest in Bollywood actors too.

In a related way, Sandhya's mother's suggestion to play an English-language film to entice Prem at night shows how much media shapes her ideas about intimacy and relationships. Her suggestion reflects a belief that Western films holds the power to transform personal relationships and resolve conflicts, demonstrating the widespread cultural impact of movies in shaping behaviours and expectations in real life.

Furthermore, her remark that Sandhya is lucky to have "tape cassette people" near her, followed by her statement, "There will be a revolution among the poor" (00:20:57), highlights her view that access to media—through audio and video cassettes—can bring about social and economic change. This suggests that she finds movies as tools of empowerment and upward mobility, capable of elevating the lives of those who consume it. However, it also shows her belief that films can control intimate aspects of life, such as seduction, reflecting how deeply entrenched the culture industry has become in dictating both personal and societal transformations, even contributing to issues like body shaming.

Drawing the Threads Together

Both Hollywood and Bollywood influence the Nepali film industry, but the influence of Bollywood seems particularly dominant. By continuously making fun of and abusing guests or artists based only on their appearance, a number of Nepali and Indian films and television comedy shows, including *The Kapil Sharma Show*, *Comedy Champion*, *Sakkigoni*, *Comedy Darbar*, and *Mundre Ko Comedy Club*, frequently encourage body shaming. Such humour can cause severe harm to people who are dealing with body image issues, even though it may amuse some audiences. These shows ought to take inspiration from movies like *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, which encourage self-acceptance and combat body shaming, rather than normalizing such offensive humour.

Comedy should be enjoyable without making others feel inferior, so it is time for these programs to produce comedy that elevates rather than denigrates people. Jagdish Kharel and Jitu Nepal's conversation on a programme *Hot Seat* highlights a significant

change in the development of heroism in Nepali cinema. During the programme, Kharel praises Nepal's transition from comedy roles to mainstream popularity calling him a symbol of the chances that artists in the modern day have (00:52:22-00: 53:23). There are some positive notes too. Where icons like Rajesh Hamal, Bhuwan KC, Shiva Shrestha, Karishma Manandhar, Mausami Malla and Saroj Khanal once symbolized the ideal artists based on beauty, stature and appearance, modern audiences now place greater value on storytelling depth and acting skill.

In the past, female characters and comedians were supportive to the lead actors. They had rare or no lead roles. This shift has enabled females, Madhesis and comedians like Jitu Nepal, Deepak Raj Giri, Kedar Ghimire, Rekha Thapa, Najir Hussain, Pramod Agrahari, Rabindra Jha and so on who may not fit conventional physical moulds, to thrive in lead roles. Such progress signals a broader reimagining of beauty and heroism, fostering inclusivity for individuals historically sidelined due to their appearance and reshaping aspirations in Nepal's entertainment landscape.

In the end, the culture industry has long propagated a damaging narrative that links value to physical attractiveness, driven by limited beauty standards. The way that films like *Wonder* and *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* subvert this harmful cultural narrative by focusing on unusual heroes and straight against the negative consequences of body shaming is very remarkable. By boldly imagining alternative norms and advocating for body acceptance, these narratives offer a powerful critique of the limited beauty standards maintained by the culture industry.

As significant cultural instruments, films must reject harmful trends. Filmmakers ought to aim for wholesome entertainment that honours diversity and makes sure that

everyone feels represented and respected. The culture industry should aim to provide healthy entertainment that embraces diversity and makes sure that everyone feels valued and represented. Audiences deserve stories that empower and inspire, not ones that reinforce negative stereotypes. As important participants in the culture industry, Nepali filmmakers must acknowledge their role in influencing public opinion and make a commitment to producing work that promotes inclusivity and highlights the value of human diversity. The selected films powerfully convey the emotional vulnerability and mental distress of those who face body shaming through their poignant verbal and nonverbal cues, intimate camera angles, narratives of self-acceptance, and powerful metaphors for societal judgment. The entertainment business ensures equal access to positive portrayal by doing this.

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