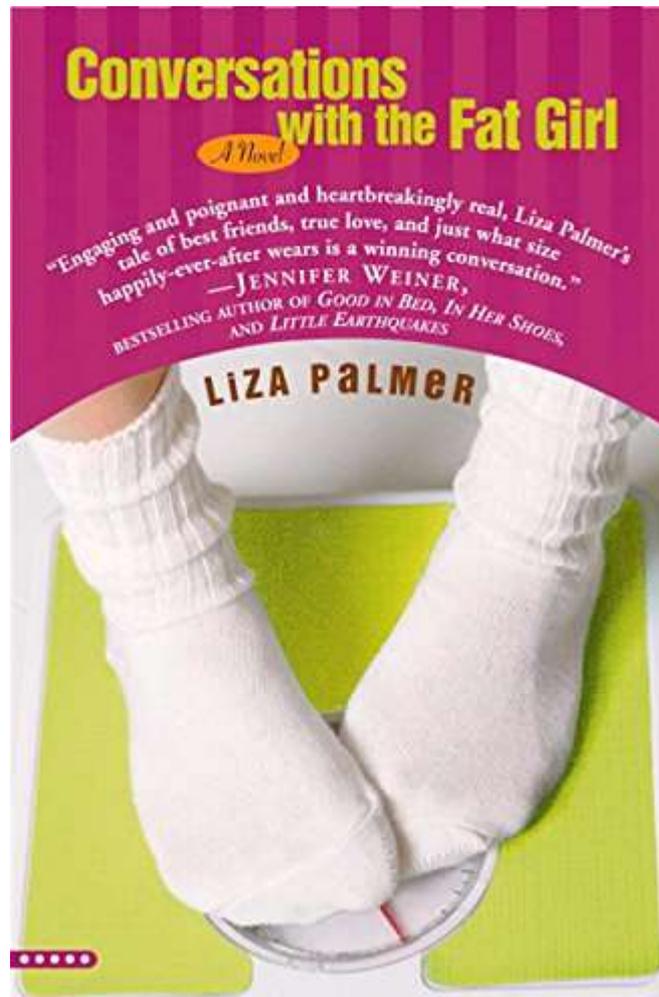


## The Interrogation of Chick - Media in Terms of 'Looks'

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### Ideology of Perfect Body

One of the major tenets of chick media is the look - issue that the protagonist undergoes. The female protagonist who is conscious of her body, struggles to reduce her weight and suffers sleeping and eating disorders. The protagonist is not beautiful and hence endures inferiority complex. The physical appearance of woman, the social stand point, the psychological impact and the agony

undergone becomes a major and recurring subject in chick - media. While the historical background of body consciousness dates from the time of antiquity, the rejection of size - zero or other body issues features in Radical or Second Wave feminism. Fat Feminism, which is a major ideological standpoint in Third Wave Feminism states that size - zero is a misogynistic tendency that men and society has constructed towards women, to make them more alluring in the eyes of men, thus objectifying women's physic and providing men with voyeuristic pleasure. The ideology of perfect body for women differs depending upon geographical location and social construct. Blonde women are considered beautiful in the West, while women with long coal black hair is considered beautiful in India. This ideology changes from time to time, sometimes it is Marilyn Monroe's bob; later it was the tomboyish look and now it is the pixie cut; but the belief that women should have a perfect figure has never changed through history and despite geographic differences. The 34 - 28 - 34 ideology is a structure that every woman is socially forced to aim for. This was rejected by fat feminism, the fat - acceptance movement wanted woman to embrace their body as it is.

### **Decline of Fat Acceptance**

However, fat acceptance movement has undergone a slow decline and the need for fit figure is widespread again. The internet is filled with how to lose weight questions and bikini body workouts. YouTube posts thousands of video in a day regarding weight loss issues, which puts lot of pressure on womenfolk. With junk and street food on one hand and weight loss diets and protein shakes in another, modern women struggle with weight issues. Books like *The Edible woman* by Margaret Atwood shows the despair of woman regarding body issues.

### ***The Big Bang Theory***

In the American television series, *The Big Bang Theory* two characters Raj and Penny can be seen as perfect examples of the same. Though Raj is a man, he is the quintessential metrosexual, who loves reading chick lit, watches chick flicks and is constantly worried about his body and stops himself from eating carbs. Similarly, Penny who is shown as lazy, alcoholic and food lover in the beginning starts to lose confidence mid-season and becomes highly conscious of her body, involving in high intensity training workouts. The change in Penny's attitude from "I Love Steaks" in the first season to yoga trainer and early morning raiser to do her jogging routine around the eighth one is highly significant.

### ***Bridget Jones Diary***

This pressure to maintain the body is used in a comic way in Chicklit. *Bridget Jones Diary*, a novel by Helen Fielding is about Bridget Jones who is fat, alcoholic and lives a shabby life. However, when she meets Mark Darcy, who insults her about her weight, she becomes conscious, and starts maintaining a journal to keep a track of her workout and eating routines. Her life becomes problematic when her boss Daniel Cleaver whom she has been dating cheats on her with a sexy, thin woman. These incidents in her life motivate her to become a sexy woman who ends up losing her weight.

### ***Size 12 is Not Fat***

*Size 12 is Not Fat* by Meg Cabot is a Chicklit novel with a detective motif. It portrays Heather Wells who struggles to lose weight but ends up spending an inordinate amount of time either eating junk food or thinking about eating. There is a sequel to this novel named *Size 14 is Not Fat Either*, which also portrays women's perennial struggle of weight loss.

### **Indian Scenario**

In the Indian scenario Preeti Shenoy's Novel *Tea for Two and a Piece of Cake* portrays Nisha the protagonist who is insecure because of being overweight at the age of 26. The plump girl status leads her to belittle herself and this pressure on her makes her choose a wrong guy in life thus ending up in a horrible marriage. Nisha's husband finally leaves her for a younger and sexier woman.

### **The Bitch War**

The bitch war, a derogatory but satiric portrayal of women's bonding and friendship with weight loss and weight gain is a major theme in chick lit. In the book *The Devil wears Prada* Andy and Emily Charlton involve in a war created by the devil Miranda. Emily who has been dieting for months to attend the fall fashion show in Paris to try new branded clothes, is refused opportunity because of Andy, an intelligent and thinner woman. This creates a rupture in their friendship.

In the movie *Bride Wars*, two best friends, who want to be each other's bridesmaids during their respective weddings, accidentally end up having wedding on the same day. Both head strong characters find it difficult to change the wedding date and hence end up trying to spoil each other's wedding. The major scenario deals with how Emma sends Liv secret candies that make her too fat. This leads Liv's wedding dress becoming too small to fit her. Similarly, in the movie *Mean Girls*, which has become a pop cultural phenomenon, the fight is to become the prom queen. Four girls who are friends end up fighting in mean ways for the title. Regina one of the toughest competitor sends up gaining weight because her friend lies to her and gives her weight gain bars instead of weight loss bars.

### **Weight Drama, Colour, and Body**

The media features wars and bonding between woman through 'weight - drama'. The book *Boot Camp* by Kate Harrison deals with funny and heart-breaking incidents between three friends who goes to boot camp to lose their weight. The novel deals with the journey of weight loss and friendship hand - in - hand. There are few novels which are extremely motivating where women learn to embrace their physical body; fat or thin. *The Wife's Tale* by Lori Lansens tells about Mary Gooch once slender and young who loses her husband for younger woman on the eve of her 25th anniversary. She is fat and in her mid - thirties. The novel ends in her understanding and starting to love her life and body. Similarly, *Conversations with the Fat Girl* by Liza Palmer portrays two women who have learnt to embrace their fat body and continue with their life.

Another major issue dealt within chick - media is beauty treatments from colour issues, hair issues, age issues to beauty surgery. In the movie *Legally Blonde*, the female protagonist struggles to break the notion that blondes are dumb. The stereotype of blonde women considered very attractive but dumb is questioned and debunked in this movie. The Blonde girl who becomes a lawyer in the end, argues a case by using beauty concepts and finds the killer. The blonde girls do not lose her identity or love for make - up but they also prove that it is their personal world and it has nothing to do with smartness. Similarly, in the Thai movie named *A Crazy Little Thing Called Love*, the protagonist undergoes inferiority complex because of her colour and body. Her friends help her overcome her inferiority by giving her beauty treatment and teach her to use make up.

The beauty treatments from surgeries like liposuction, nose - job, breast upliftment to betox injections are discussed in chick media. The girl finally coming in terms with her flaws becomes the focal point of these stories. In the movie *Bad teacher*, the protagonist takes up a teaching job to get a breast implant. The movie ends with her coming to terms with her body.

### **Wardrobe**

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The concept of wardrobe change and beauty makeover is another recurring theme in chick media. In the book *The sisterhood of the Travelling pants* by Ann Brashares, the pant, that fits four friends perfectly, despite their size, brings them close into a sisterly bond. The novel *The Princess Dairies* by Meg Cabot also features a major beauty makeover when an awkward and unpopular school girl turns into a beautiful, suave, womanly princess.

### **Gorge Factor**

One more dictum that dominates chick - lit is 'The gorge - factor' as Stephanie Harzewski says in her book *Chick lit and Postfeminism*. The sexual appeal of the author of these books plays a vital role in publication and marketing of Chick - lit books. According to her,

*“The Increasing emphasis on compulsory glamour has implications beyond publishers marketing strategy for the chick lit niche. We cannot help but speculate that chick lit’s physically attractive female author invites the idea in younger or less experienced writers .... Will imbue them with glamour, sophistication, or sexual desirability.”*

While there is a debate about positive and negative traits in importance given to women’s body in chick media, the women grow up into a positive person in the end, and this transformation motivates readers and movie - watchers. Lipstick feminism and its derivative Stiletto Feminism embraces women’s world of makeup and consumer fetishism. The world of certain women may comprise of make - up products and men; other women cannot be judgmental about the same. The taboo behind the use of red lipstick, and the remark that women who use make up are sluts is condemned in these movements. It is a woman’s liberty to choose what she wears and how she wants to wear it.

### **Ideological Shift in Feminist Theory**

These feminists mark an ideological shift in feminist theory, a huge difference from Second Wave feminism. It is usually demarcated under the category of Third and Post-feminism. The Second Wave feminists who opposed every measure that women took to allure and appease men, interrogated and debunked the necessity of women to endure pain for a pleasing look. The ‘bra burning movement’ caused major agitation, when women trashed bra, stilettos and make up in a can and burnt them because they felt that these were symbols of women’s oppression. Second Wave feminism opposed men’s patriarchy and women’s confinement to sexist stereotypes. However, with post-feminism the attitude changed as the term ‘celebration of womanhood’ came into existence. The women started dressing for themselves, to attract men and they considered it as an embodiment of power. The change in perspective changed the allegory of prey and predator. The women who viewed themselves as prey in Second Wave feminism by rejected beautification; it was with post-feminism that women started to believe in their power to make men prey to their beauty. The attitude that a sexy woman can achieve success began and stiletto feminism embraced this opinion. The control and power were exemplified in attitude, and with right fashion to carry them, they became more confident. Carrie in *Sex and The City*, Rebecca Bloomwood in *The Confession series* and Miranda in *The Devil wears Prada* are portrayed as independent and empowered despite their weakness for fashion.

### **To Conclude**

Thus, chick - media portrays the action of woman choosing what they want as empowering. While the debate is ongoing in terms of whether woman is sexually objectifying herself or whether she is trying to be empowered; it must be said that the contemporary, Postfeminist New Woman celebrates her sexuality and femininity as objects of tools to overcome patriarchy and sexism in society.

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