

The Beautiful (*Precious*) Fat People (*Gordos*) That Reach the Screens

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In our society and in similar ones, it is clear that obesity is a problem that is constantly on the rise and that affects individuals at increasingly earlier ages.

The omnipresence of image in our environment has made us familiar with seeing people of all types and appearances, but the most extreme cases as far as weight is concerned -that is those who suffer terrible famines in Africa, anorexics and overweight people, are the ones that we find particularly disturbing; they shake our conscience as if we thought we had some sort of responsibility for their situation. Neither do we manage to understand why they "have become" what they are, since they are usually the product of processes that require some time to become manifest.

From the health-professional's point of view, it is inevitable to consider obesity as a constituent element of illness in its morbid version, or as the beginning of a process that will, in time, lead to future pathologies. From the layman's point of view, obesity is basically regarded as something fundamentally related to one's own image, and hence something that determines the way in which we mutually perceive ourselves. Another matter is that of "being overweight", which is experienced as a circumstance subject to modification, and that of "being a fat person", an assumption that leaves less margin for changes.

The cult to the body is portrayed as one of the axes of life, but not only to enjoy it and use it freely, but also to control it. To associate success and sensuality with a single model is one of the subtlest and most obsessive ways of social control. Occasionally, current fashion, with its 90-60-90 stereotypes for women, has done more harm than good to one half of humanity, leading to diverse illnesses ranging from psychological

discomfort (feelings of rejection) to others as serious as anorexia and bulimia.

Cinema is a reflection of reality, which, as we all know, may remain true or become distorted; it can show, overexpose, denounce, manipulate, and in short, present any issue, obesity included, in thousands of different ways.

If a record of films with obesity as their central theme were made, *Gordos* (fat people) (2009) by Daniel Sánchez Arévalo would surely be indispensable.

One of its merits is that of providing a catalogue of fat people that ranges from the teenager to the fifty-year-old, from the housewife to the executive, from the one who does not acknowledge the problem to the one that ponders on its worst consequences.

Gordos sets out the contradictory nature of love and desire through its couples: parents who are apparently happy with their sex life while at the same time unable to educate their children, repressed lovers who desire to explore their sexuality, computer professionals who are bored when together, and that of a psychologist who is unable to empathize with his partner, who is expecting his child.

Gordos provides a pleasant, almost patronizing view of obesity, but it also presents scenes that show the cruel and violent mockery that it can lead to among certain teenagers.

It is not the brutality that we perceive in *Precious* (2009) by Lee Daniels (based on the novel *Push*, by Sapphire, Ramona Lofton's pen name). This drama, which won the Special Jury Award at the Sundance-2009 Festival, tells the story of an obese 16-year-old teenager

who lives in Harlem, is subjected to physical and psychological abuse by her mother, is expecting her second child, a result of rape by her own father and, who, in spite of being in the last years of Secondary Education, cannot read or write. Undoubtedly *Precious*, also a winner of the TVE Otra Mirada Award (San Sebastián International Film Festival, 2009), is another essential film as an educational resource in the subject of morbid obesity.

Without reaching cases of extreme obesity, *Real Women have Curves* (2002) by Patricia Cardoso provides an alternative model of women, far from the most common beauty canons that pervade our current civilization. This film portrays a teenager in search of her own identity and self-assertiveness in a society that connects image with professional success.

The ideal educational contexts for the analysis of *Gordos* or *Precious* could be those corresponding to Undergraduate Degrees in Psychology, Medicine, Social Work, Nutrition, and Nursing, among others. It could also be useful in groups and associations where topics such as self-esteem, violence and the self-image play a prominent role and, naturally, for the observation, reflection about,

and analysis of its dialogues in Secondary Education classrooms.

From the point of view of research, it would be interesting to assess the impact caused by the use of these films within the above contexts, as well as in the context of groups of patients.

Without returning to the analysis of *Gordos*, already available in DVD and Blu-ray format, it is necessary to stress that in an intelligent, sensitive and honest way this film presents most of the obesity typologies, the consequences derived from them, and how these determine the way of thinking, feeling and acting of the main characters and their environment.

The fact of presenting a context such as the special therapy group for overweight people and that of there being characters of very different ages, social levels, family, work and affective backgrounds, makes this film an exceptional tool for approaching a subject, obesity, that is so interesting from an epidemiological point of view.

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