

# “Let Alone at Miss Universe”: Siera Bearchell as Embodiment of Cultural Resistance of Femininity in Miss Universe

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## ABSTRACT

The existence of plus size contender in Miss Universe has broken down the normalization of slenderness which has been one of manifestations of femininity in American society and its beauty pageant industries. The plus size lens is brought by Siera Bearchell who has been placed on Top 9 in Miss Universe 2016 edition to resist the cultural normalization of slender body size. By using textual analysis, this research focuses on Siera Bearchell's YouTube videos and news articles related to the plus size contender to investigate the way she embodies the cultural resistance through her personal practices in the Miss Universe pageant. This research shows that Siera Bearchell has failed at embodying the dominant ideology of feminine slender ideal in Miss Universe. However, this failure cannot put Siera Bearchell to cultural obedience to the bodily ideal. This occurs since Siera Bearchell has resisted the cultural normalization by embodying her plus size body as a state for personal space and freedom. Therefore, the symbol of normalization of feminine slender size contradicts her identity as the plus size contender. Ultimately, this research shows that the existence of plus size contender in Miss Universe has been a symbol of

cultural resistance of femininity in the American beauty pageant.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every country has its own beauty ideals and America has also its own standards when it comes to beauty ideals. One of aspects that American beauty ideals have mostly emphasized on is women's body image. Women's body image ideal is closely perpetuated by the idea of having slender body (Conlin & Bissell, 2014). The notion of slenderness is accentuated by American society, including its media. To a great extent, American media have contributed to perpetuate the women's body image through the portrayal of female bodily ideal of slender (Kate, 2018). The portrayal of female slender ideal is also perpetuated by Miss Universe as one of the most prominent American beauty pageants.

The existence of Miss Universe as the most prominent American beauty pageant has been said to depict the attitude toward women's body image of slenderness. The fact exemplifies that Donald Trump, the owner of Miss Universe Organization during 1994 until 2014, mocked Alicia Machado for gaining so much weight after winning the crown (Barbaro & Twohey, 2016). This evidence has illuminated that essence of beauty is designed to underline the core value within American beauty pageant. The core value of beauty emphasizing slenderness turns into a form of hegemonizing women's slender ideal in Miss Universe as a beauty pageant that embodies American cultural ideal of femininity. In this case, femininity symbolizes an 'exquisite aesthetic' meaning that women must embrace the standards of behavior, characteristics, physical presentation and appearance based on social demands (The Gale Group, 2005). Thus, the bottom line is that femininity has also been perpetuated within countries having beauty pageants.

Some of researchers have attempted to investigate how femininity is perpetuated within countries having beauty pageant. Watson & Martin's analysis investigates the way Miss America accentuates the idea of femininity through the judgement of physical beauty. In this case, Watson & Martin (2000) have argued that women truly struggle to remove's physical beauty as the measure of women's worth as a form of women's objectification.

Meanwhile, Lieu's research has argued that even beauty pageants still objectify women, some of various Vietnamese beauty pageants have tried to promote women's participation of consumer culture in the global market. However, Lieu (2013) still emphasizes that being slender is the key to join the pageant as a form of, to borrow

Susan Bordo's term, 'normalization' ideal of femininity. Meanwhile, Gilbert's research tries to investigate how femininity is negotiated in beauty pageant. Since femininity may also refer to women's domestic matters or women becoming "angel of the house" (The Gale Group, 2005), Gilbert (2015) has argued that the way women become the angel of the house as a symbol of femininity can be negotiated through the constant performance of making the pageantry as a platform for 'success' in Nigerian beauty pageant. The notion of 'success' is accentuated by Gilbert as a route to reach financial success of winning the prize instead of embracing women's status to get married and become housewives. Meanwhile, still, these researches have not specifically explored the way plus size figure resists the physical presentation of slenderness as the attribute of femininity infused into beauty pageant.

However, the existence of Siera Bearchell in Miss Universe has become a sort of a controversy and a new chapter. Siera Bearchell, as the Canadian plus size contender in the Miss Universe edition in 2016 who has been placed on Top 9, can be said to be a controversy as some said that a plus size figure does not take place in the pageant. Meanwhile, Siera Bearchell, as the Canadian representative who has negated the American value of bodily ideal inserted into the Miss Universe pageant, is believed to represent a new chapter where women can resist the normalization of cultural slender ideal as the feature of femininity.

This research attempts to examine that Siera Bearchell, as the Canadian plus size contender in Miss Universe pageant, in some ways, embodies the cultural resistance of femininity. This research focuses on the plus size side as a form to counter the normalization of American slender ideal glorified within the Miss Universe pageant. By observing her cultural resistance of femininity in the American beauty pageant, this research perpetuates the element of cultural resistance in joining Miss Universe to fight against the American slender body as the form of normalized women's ideal.

## 2. METHOD

This research was a part of qualitative textual analysis research which investigated the meaning of social phenomenon through texts (Woods, 1999; McKee, 2003). As this research applied the textual analysis, this research focused on Siera Bearchell, the Canadian plus size contender in Miss Universe 2016 edition, with her statements inclined toward the idea of cultural resistance of American feminine ideal of slenderness. Doing textual analysis also underlined the idea of observing Siera Bearchell's videos on YouTube and news articles related to Siera Bearchell and treating it as texts of a social phenomenon. Therefore, the notion of textual analysis, here, revolved around inviting people to investigate a social phenomenon through interpreting texts (McKee, 2003).

As this research was based on textual analysis, this research took two kinds of data primarily taken from media sources. The main data were collected from the videos taken from Siera Bearchell's channel on YouTube. The main data were in the forms of words, phrases and sentences taken from the YouTube videos. The secondary data were collected from news article related to Siera Bearchell as the Canadian plus size contender in Miss Universe 2016 edition. The main data were also in the forms of words, phrases and sentences taken from the news articles. Both main and secondary data centered on her experiences in joining Miss Universe 2016 and also about how she countered the normalization of slender ideal inserted into Miss Universe by embodying her plus size side.

Furthermore, both of the data were collected through observation. The data were understood through observation by watching the videos of Siera Bearchell on her YouTube channel and reading the news articles related to Siera Bearchell. The videos were in the form of interior monologue exemplified that she conveyed her message through the use of words.

The next techniques of collecting data were in the forms of reading and taking notes of the observed texts. The secondary data, which were the online news related to Siera Bearchell, were understood through the process of reading online news articles about the Canadian plus size contender and how she experienced body image issues. Furthermore, the next technique was taking notes of words, phrases and sentences uttered by Siera Bearchell in her YouTube channel, and in the news related to the Canadian plus size contender.

After collecting all of the data, this research took another stride of technique which was analyzing the data. The main data and the secondary data dealt with texts which had strong tendencies to the idea of embodying cultural resistance of the normalization of slender ideal in Miss Universe. The signs derived from the text were then interpreted to identify the meaning. In this case, semiotics by Roland Barthes was used to understand the meaning behind those words, phrases and sentences said by Siera Bearchell. The signs, as the data, were analyzed with the help of Susan Bordo's theory of the politics of the body. Since Bordo (1993) has argued that body has been historically disciplined into the slender size, this form of disciplining women's body has become the dominant form. This has caused social normalization and social resistance (Bordo, 1993). Thus, in order to examine the embodiment of cultural resistance of slender normalization, the signs were used to investigate the way Siera Bearchell as the Canadian plus size contender resisted the American slender normalization transferred into the Miss Universe.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Siera Bearchell is the Canadian plus size contender in Miss Universe 2016 edition who has been placed on the Top 9 in the American beauty pageant. The eccentricity of the plus size contender in Miss Universe underlines the idea of threatening the slender empire as the American value of physical attractiveness. Deford (as cited in Watson & Martin, 2000) says that “Beauty contest are ingrained into American consciousness” (p. 106). It means that beauty pageants have contributed to transmit the slender ideal as an essential matter for women in order to gain acceptance in American society. Therefore, being slender stresses the manifestation of women’s pursuit. It gravitates toward practices to mould their body in order to have slender look (Encyclopedia Corporate Author, 2019).

Estill (2017) has addressed symbolic values of slenderness. It brings the notion of an aesthetic goal, status symbol and social power. However, Siera Bearchell, as the Canadian plus size contender, embraces the flip side of slender ideal. She perceives that being slender underscores the objectification of look. In order to fight against the objectification and discrimination of physical attractiveness, she has asserted the importance of body politics. She has claimed this issue on her YouTube video titled “THE TRUTH BEHIND MY UNIVERSE EXPERIENCE | How much money I made as MISS CANADA?”

“When you try to emulate others, when you try to be like other beauty queens, other celebrities, other people in general, you’re not gonna live a fulfilling life because you’re always trying to be something that you’re not,” (Bearchell, 2019).

What Siera Bearchell means by the statement ‘when you try to emulate others’ is the lack of body politics in women themselves. The statement signifies body politics emphasizing the way women negotiate the collective women’s bodies (Schlyter et al., 2009). The collective women’s bodies are mostly perpetuated by the female icons. This issue is encapsulated within the phrase ‘other beauty queens, other celebrities, other people in general’. This phrase has inclined toward the perception where the constant performance of ideal bodies by female icons in public spheres may consequence, borrowing Bordo’s idea, the ‘normalization’. Bordo’s term of ‘normalization’ means that the domination over the women’s bodies is idealized (Bordo, 1993). The prevailing and the most basic while dominant perception center on the slenderness of female prominent figure, including beauty pageant contenders competing in the Miss Universe. Bearchell’s previous argument stands behind the notion of, to use the term coined by Kim Chernin, ‘the tyranny of slenderness’ where female icons are mainly related with being slender (Chernin, 1981).

The tyranny of slenderness, coined by Chernin, makes an aspect where women’s body appearance is focused on the thin norm as a kind of beauty ideals (Chernin, 1981). Here, Siera Bearchell’s statement points out that women’s ideal is, foremost, accentuated to the slender look as the normalized ideal. This slender ideal has been glorified within Miss Universe where American value has been perpetuated by the contenders joining the pageant.

To a great extent, the contenders joining the Miss Universe must perpetuate the American value of beauty. This American value of beauty exists within the horizon of having no flesh within body. This becomes a sense of beauty since the notion of it has been connoted by the existence of slender female figures in American media. American media have popularized and contributed this ideal to make women unable to resist this (Bissell & Chung, 2009). The way women are unable to resist the dictated look becomes a sort of normalization. Thus, the way Bearchell has addressed the statement ‘you’re not gonna live a fulfilling life because you’re always trying to be something that you’re not’ signals the view of being unable to resist the cultural normalization of slenderness.

That means, it becomes clear that the feeling of being unable to express the cultural normalization of slender means that women are not liberated to have their own definitions of body. Bordo (1993) has argued that culture has taught women not to have own definition of bodies because culture has constantly monitored women for signs of imperfections to make women engaged in any physical improvement, including embracing the slender ideal. Siera Bearchell has made it on point in online news article titled “Miss Canada Siera Bearchell: ‘I’m not promoting obesity, I’m promoting confidence’

“I almost felt like an outsider while I listened to people to eat lean protein, only green vegetables and no fruit besides green apple,” (Bearchell, as cited in Tangtiangco 2017, para. 5).

Here, Siera Bearchell has underlined Bordo’s idea where culture has monitored women the way they look. Within this framework, American culture has dominated the way women see their bodies as the essence of femininity since the slender culture has exhibited its superiority in the American pageant stage. As Cohen (1984) has argued that slender has been related to femininity and it makes women pursue their slenderness, it marks Bearchell’s words ‘lean protein, only green vegetables and no fruit besides green apple’ alludes to the value where having flesh and fat become detrimental elements of femininity. Therefore, Siera Bearchell, as the Canadian plus size contender, has been dictated to follow a low fat diet in order to lessen her weight to be able to join Miss Universe where slenderness as the element of femininity has played an important point within the American beauty pageant.

The important point is that flesh and fat have been identified as the detrimental forces of femininity. Orbach (as cited in Chernin, 1981) has asserted that the images of womanhood are synonymous with the idea of being

slender meaning that there is no room for fat and flesh. As Chernin (1981) has claimed that the existence of flesh has become a determining system meaning that many women have struggled against this issue, they have perceived that the flesh and fat becomes the opposition. That gives an understanding that any woman who embraces this component is alienated from culture and society (Chernin, 1981). If it says so, this alienation has also happened in American society since Miss Universe has also glorified this slenderness since Chernin (1981) has argued that, "The problem is not about the body, it's about the attitude toward the body" (p. 30). The argument reflects that the way American society works to alienate women who do not embrace this ideal has become more prevalent, including in the stage of Miss Universe.

The Miss Universe pageant has also emphasized this slender size. Contenders joining this pageant have struggled to gain acceptance. Acceptance, here, is connoted by the way contenders are able to go through the next round since they have embraced this slender size. It makes women have perceived that the notion of beauty is generally perpetuated through becoming the epitome of society ideal. That suggests women are able to take any consequence in the pursuit of becoming the ideal. Thus, the pursuit centers on being slender since slenderness connotes the implication of cultural construction (Bordo, 1993).

Here, Bearchell's statement goes hand-in-hand with the way many women is taught to see bodies as a source of cultural construction (Bordo, 1993). Within this substance, femininity becomes a cultural construction and has a static characteristic (Estill, 2017). That says women are dictated to understand that slender is characteristically put in a higher place as it is identified with intelligence, competence and self-control (Bordo, 1993). Hence, it gets to a point where culture considers becoming a fat or a plus size as defiant since it signals the imperfections and counters the normalization of slender ideal.

On a large scale, the case of the plus size figure entering the Miss Universe as the American prominent beauty pageant is considered as a challenging event to the cultural normalization of slenderness. Since Bordo (1993) has also argued that society glamorizes slenderness, including in American society where Miss Universe has been held in, women have to be socially adapted with this ideal. Thus, their bodies have been shaped, trained, and moulded into the fittest size, being slender (Bordo, 1993). In online news article titled "Miss Universe Canada Siera Bearchell Opens Up About Self-Love and Body Image," she has addressed this issue by claiming,

"I was recently asked 'What happened to you? Why have you gained weight? You are losing points' This was reference to my body of course," (Bearchell, as cited in Markovinovic, 2017, para. 18).

Bearchell's statement implies that one of the pivotal roles playing within the Miss Universe stage is the body size. The statement saying 'what happened to you? Why have you gained weight? You are losing points' beckons the normalization where the ideal of slenderness has been an idealized and fixed entity. This makes women are unable to voice their cultural expressions yet they treat it as an essential aesthetic when it comes to joining the Miss Universe pageant. That comes to the action where the Miss Universe body has focused on slenderness. In the same news article, she has added that,

"It takes discipline to have the body of Miss Universe," (Bearchell, as cited in Markovinovic, 2017, para. 5).

Given that, the contenders joining the pageant have been expected to exhibit their slender bodies. The statement indicates that becoming Miss Universe takes a pressure, the pressure of removing flesh from the bodies that they showcase. Since Brownmiller (1984) has argued that flesh has become a problematic situation to femininity, it means that in order to envision a feminine feature, the fleshiness has been outlawed for the sake of feminine identity in the guise of beauty. Ergo, slenderness has been a response toward the need of women to have a feminine impression. Otherwise, the contenders who do not fit this, gets no social power. Siera Bearchell has noted that the existence of the Canadian plus size contender in the American beauty pageant has made her being trolled by people who dispel her. This marks that the plus size figure is a form of digression. Thus, Siera Bearchell has been accused of being a negative parenthesis. She has underlined this matter in an online news article titled "Ashley Graham and Miss Universe Canada have a few words for body shamers,"

"How does it feel to be so much...larger than other delegates?' I was asked in a press junket by a member of media. I was almost left speechless," (Bearchell, as cited in Walker, 2017, para. 8).

Siera Bearchell's phrase 'press junket by a member of media' delivers a sign that she has received pressures from the media. As Stice and Shaw (1994) has emphasized that "Cultural female ideal is 'communicated' to women, with mass media being 'one of the strongest transmitters of this pressure'" (p. 289), it creates an understanding that Siera Bearchell is a form of anomalousness happening in the American beauty pageant. To make it more clear, the verbalism saying 'larger than other delegates' sets up an alert that Siera Bearchell's physical characteristic does not reflect a desire for attractiveness. Since American media have defined the term 'attractiveness' by the presence of slenderness, American culture then treats fatness as the thing that weakens women's characteristics. That says, if Bearchell's previous indication of having a larger size is linked to the image of fatness ingrained within the American society, it marks that fatness becomes a weakening trait of femininity. It clarifies that Siera Bearchell has been viewed as a sign of imperfection because of her plus size. She does not merge with the normalization of slenderness infused into the Miss Universe. This thing creates a symbolic depiction that Siera Bearchell delivers a flip side of beauty.

That means not only the ideal beauty of slenderness brings social values, the flip side of slenderness also brings ideas and values as well (Estill, 2017). Given that, Siera Bearchell makes a new idea and value that the plus size contender joining the American beauty pageant becomes a cultural resistance. The verdict of Siera Bearchell perceiving that being plus size is the way she voices her resistance of size ideal alters her to have her own value. Since beauty pageants, including Miss Universe, have been criticized for reducing women's worth based on their sizes (BBC News, 2013), this makes a cultural normalization where slenderness becomes a judgement point for physical attractiveness. Women have been resorted to apply this doctrinal matter to their bodies. While Siera Bearchell's presence has come to resist this cultural normalization through heterogeneity and indeterminacy, both components underpin the way Siera Bearchell has perceived the presence of a flip side of body size within the normalized slender ideal. On her YouTube video titled "TOO FAT? TOO SKINNY? What we were told before competing at MISS UNIVERSE," she has proclaimed,

"Everyone is different, right? It's like everyone's definition is different. And it isn't defined by what you look like," (Bearchell, 2018).

The statement accumulates the way Siera Bearchell has resisted the normalization of slender ideal through the principles of heterogeneity and indeterminacy of the bodily ideals. Bordo (1993) has asserted that "Heterogeneity and indeterminacy as principles to interpret culture, history and texts by seeking the difference" (p. 39). The basic principle of culture, history and text coexist with the slenderness in which it holds a hierarchical structure of ideal size. Slenderness is defined as a type of ideal appearance. It represents a triumph of the will over the body and hunger (Bordo, 1993). These types of triumph of body and hunger in slenderness have been what women pursue. Thus, still and foremost, the tyranny of slenderness, as Kim Chernin has called it, becomes the epitome of women's feminine ideal (Bordo, 1993).

However, it is not, to be called heterogeneity, if it is not about seeking the difference of the hegemonized feminine matters. Siera Bearchell's statement 'everyone's definition is different' marks the turning point of cultural resistance. The cultural resistance unveils that some of the ideas and discourses of femininity are accepted, including the discourses of body image slenderness. Meanwhile, other discourses which have inclined towards defiance are excluded and marginalized (Weingarten, 1995). To point out, the hegemonized feminine discourse of slender is resisted by Siera Bearchell through her body perceptions on daily basis. The daily basis is signalled by the phrase 'it isn't defined by what you look like'. The phrase accentuates the umbilical point when it comes to women's daily basis. Women's daily basis includes their appearances.

Bordo (1993) has asserted that women's appearances incorporate the way women dress and what they eat. That enunciates, from the perspective of dresses and food, the basic line draws upon the presence of women's bodies. The women's bodies are the medium of culture meaning that women perpetually practice the feminine matters on their lives. These practices are required marking that the ideal femininity becomes a prerequisite through the performance of the dress that women wear, the movements and behavior of how women should look like, and the bodily shape that women should appear to be. These daily basis, therefore, are what limit their lives symbolizing that the relationship between individuals and culture is mediated through the constant performance of becoming ideal whatever the circumstances (Weingarten, 1995). With her quote may be intended to counter the slender narrative, by comparing everyone's definition of themselves to one another, Siera Bearchell ridicules the America's glorification of slender size as it does not represent inclusivity.

Bearchell's statement becomes clearer that inclusivity does not exist while resistance has been one of the most effective measures to fight against it. Siera Bearchell has pointed out the resistance as she has defined that bodily shape and appearance does not prescribe women's look. The symbolic idea of Bearchell's resistance comes from how she sees the body. She sees her body as a source of expressing her inner life. On Bearchell's YouTube video entitled "DID I GAIN WEIGHT ON PURPOSE TO COMPETE at MISS UNIVERSE? | My body transformation journey," she has made a statement,

"It is what it is. I'm eating healthy. I'm working out because I love to work out. I love to sweat. I love to feel good and it makes me confident. I just want you to know that you need to do what feels good for you. Just don't have to look at a certain way...I just want people to know that you can be healthy, you can be confident, you can feel beautiful without looking a certain way," (Bearchell, 2018).

The previous statement by Siera Bearchell gives an emphasis on the guise of body as an expression of inner life. Meanwhile, Schwartz (as cited in Bordo, 1993) has theorized differently. He has argued that body shape becomes an obstacle to expression of 'inner' life'. It means that women's cultural construction of body shapes and sizes are what limit them from expressing who they are because they do not have the full control and determinacy element over their bodies. Since Bearchell's statement and Schwartz's argument are in a different place, Bearchell's previous statement also contradicts Schwartz's in which Bearchell's body has instead paved the way for her inner life. Ergo, the presence of Siera Bearchell has delivered a concept of resistance. The element of resistance can be traced through the enunciation saying 'it is what it is. I'm eating healthy. I'm working out because I love to work out'. The argument evidently highlights Siera Bearchell's resistance of normalization of slender body. The point to focus on is that the dominant and 'normal' discourse of women primarily revolves around food

denial in order to have slender look (Diamond & Quinby, 1988). In order to have slender look, any dieters have to live in a constant denial of eating food where bingeing is justified as an inappropriate action for women (Bordo, 1993).

Considerably, Siera Bearchell emphasizes that she has eaten whatever she wants to eat. The angle marking 'I am eating healthy' is situated on the position to justify the cultural resistance. The resistance is perpetuated through rejecting self-starvation. Self-starvation indicates the reluctance to food supplies. It is derived from the industries which oblige the figure having slender body to succeed (Health Engine Corporate Author, 2003). This becomes a normalized image of women as they can find their way of succeed through being slender. Thus, Siera Bearchell has resisted this cultural normalization through the idea of not making herself self-starved to have slender look. Siera Bearchell resists the normalization of slender body by eating healthy and working out as ways to build up her confidence. As Bordo (1993) has theorized that women rarely build their body up, they just whittle it down, only women who do workouts who try to do in reverse. From this substance, Bordo (1993) has tried to examine the way women are often self-starved themselves in order to have slender look. Meanwhile, the reality prescribes that they just do whittle down the body as they mediate their lives to hunger. This is the feminine cultural matter that Siera Bearchell has resisted. Siera Bearchell, as the Canadian plus size contender in Miss Universe, does not need to embrace the normalization of slender ideal to be successful in the beauty pageant.

Moreover, the twist of cultural resistance can also be traced through the quote 'I love to feel good and it makes me confident. I just want you to know that you need to do what feels good for you. Just don't have to look at a certain way'. The inclination toward 'I love to feel good' calls attention to Siera Bearchell's body image which is not determined by the normalization of slender look. As the Canadian plus size contender in Miss Universe, she emphasizes on discernment in the point that her body becomes a source of pleasure, not a site of burden. Bordo (1993) claims that "Female body is a source of pleasure, knowledge and power – to be revalued rather than remade" (p. 37). This becomes a language of cultural resistance since Siera Bearchell has revalued her bodies as her personal space rather than remaking her body to be a source of female slender ideal.

The reflection of bodies growing into personal space is accentuated by valuing body as a space where people cannot intrude the zone around the body. It resembles body as a 'private room' where body cannot be judged by others to cause discomfort (Iachini et al., 2014). Here, Siera Bearchell illuminates a language of resistance where she describes 'I just want you to know that you need to do what feels good for you. Just don't have to look at a certain way...I just want people to know that you can be healthy, you can be confident, you can feel beautiful without looking a certain way'. Siera Bearchell prescribes that body is neither fittest look nor public sphere. Body is illuminated as the way Siera Bearchell casts the body not to be like specific ideal to be accepted in the 'normal' sphere, but to cast the 'unfit' version of body into the dominant. As Bordo (1993) has asserted that female body is required its implementations to have specific look, Siera Bearchell has accentuated her language of resistance where she defines that the unfit female body can perform any activities in the dominant slender stage. This can be traced through the way she performs workouts and eating healthy and treats her body as her personal space where people cannot interrupt what she does to her body. If somebody interrupts other bodies, it becomes a 'totalitarian interference of self-determination and choice', as Bordo has called it (Bordo, 1993).

Siera Bearchell's action of voicing up that she has also faced the reality of interference of self-determination and choice marks an action of rebelling. She rebels against the guise of choice underlining that her choice of body image is often violated by people around her. On Bearchell's YouTube video entitled "DID I GAIN WEIGHT ON PURPOSE TO COMPETE at MISS UNIVERSE? | My body transformation journey," she has enunciated this matter through a statement,

"That comment came up so many times. Not only from people who lead the pageant, but from people who help to run the pageant and people who were involved in the pageant...I was so mentally broken down...Some people view pageants like bodybuilding competitions where the body has to look a certain way, but I have always viewed pageants as a way to access opportunities that women don't always have," (Bearchell, 2018).

The statement implies the point of people's interference with Bearchell's body shape and size. Siera Bearchell's statement has indicated that female ideal is freighted with being in a specific look, including in the Miss Universe stage. Bearchell has signalled the point in which people have dictated her not to have her own choice. Susan Bordo may call it, with her term, 'bondage'. It occurs when our conceptualization of ideal is encapsulated within 'obedience' rather than a choice (Bordo, 1993). Siera Bearchell has asserted that society has dictated her to become a 'bondage' to gain status symbol and social power since she has to mould her body size as fit as possible in the pageant sphere. From this perspective, it means that many people have interpreted an ideal feminine identity by the appearance of slender women. It turns into an obsession to be 'normal' in which the normal is the dominant; the abnormal version is the defiant.

Meanwhile, Siera Bearchell has resisted this normalization through transferring a different message and regenerating a new element to be accepted in the pageant. 'but I have always viewed pageants as a way to access opportunities that women don't always have' signalizes the way Siera Bearchell has treated a pageant as a stage where women can reproduce dominant feminine practices within society. The dominant feminine practices within

society have involved women to obey cultural demands (Bordo, 1993). These cultural demands influence norms, values and aesthetic standards in society (Pelletier et al., 2004). These agendas are what Siera Bearchell pinpoints. She embodies the cultural resistance by having a different perception and values regarding women and beauty pageant. For Siera Bearchell, women are considered as victims of the society because of the discourse of femininity inherited to them. Consequently, these women do not have an option to mitigate neither decorating nor shaping their body.

However, Siera Bearchell performs her resistance by making a new meaning of the dominant discourse in the American beauty pageant. Bordo (1993) has suggested the importance of making meaning to oppose the dominant ideology. Siera Bearchell has outlined that resistance is justified to protect women from the lack of choice. She has resisted the dominant ideology of slenderness by a new version of the contenders, the Canadian plus size contender in Miss Universe 2016. In online news article titled “Beauty beyond size’: Miss Universe Canada calls out body shamers,” she has made an enunciation,

“This physical body is not an indication of health-including physical health and mental health. To call me lazy is an insult. To say I was healthier when I was more lean is ignorant. To define me by my body demonstrates the inadequacy of our society. I’m not saying these things just for the judgment directed at me personally. I’m saying them for every woman who has ever questioned her self-worth because of her physical being,” (Bearchell, as cited in Dunham, 2017, para. 18).

Siera Bearchell’s argumentation of saying ‘this physical body is not an indication of health-including physical health and mental health. To call me lazy is an insult. To say I was healthier when I was more lean is ignorant’ deepens a new meaning of the contenders joining Miss Universe. While most the contenders want to be seen as healthy by exhibiting their slender size to underscore Kim Chernin’s statement saying “America’s greatest nutritional problem is obesity,” (p. 37), Siera Bearchell has come up with a new understanding as she becomes the plus size contender. This symbol means that Siera Bearchell does not need to be categorized as a slender contender. Instead, she still glorifies health as the form of resistance.

Verbally speaking, Siera Bearchell has indicated that she has resisted the American cultural conceptions of the body. The utterance saying ‘to define me by my body demonstrates the inadequacy of our society’ expresses the body as a forming set of practical rules. In this direction, the set of practical rules walk toward women’s bodies. The bodies have been conformed into a certain shape in order to be categorized as the beautiful one (Bissell & Chung, 2009).

To draw a straight line, Siera Bearchell’s emphasis on the term ‘inadequacy of our society’ implies that body is related to social conditioning. Since Bordo (1993) has called a normalized image as an image where the presence of the dominance is determined as a fixed standard to measure, dictate and correct women, it becomes a source of pivotal role for women to represent themselves in society. Siera Bearchell’s statement has been designed to rebel the normalized image of the Miss Universe since most of the contenders have been known for being slender. Bordo (1993) has drawn the notion of ‘rebellion against convention, and defiance against norm’ marking that women may stand up in order to defend themselves and to reform the convention on her own to break boundary.

In a greater scale, Siera Bearchell has expressed the idea of breaking the boundary by the resistance against the normalization. The statement saying ‘I’m not saying these things just for the judgment directed at me personally. I’m saying them for every woman who has ever questioned her self-worth because of her physical being’ stands for the need for woman to rebel against becoming ideal in the eye of society. With this paradigm, Siera Bearchell, the Canadian plus size contender joining the Miss Universe, brings out the weight of cultural expression and body resistance. Since the cultural expression has been defined as the way people articulate their rebelliousness against the dominant (Freire & Macedo, 1987), Siera Bearchell’s statement has highlighted her manifestations of resistance through the struggle against oppression of American dominant slender ideal.

In addition, Siera Bearchell’s previous statement points out the basic difference between being dragged in by envision of having the idealized slenderness and being vocal through a political act. The basic difference is that while most of the contenders of the pageant have dealt with weight issue to reach the bodily standard, Siera Bearchell has brought her attention to the substance of glorifying a new body size in the American beauty pageant. Ergo, she uses Miss Universe as a platform to glorify the difference marking that women can have a voice of choice over the mould they want to be. The body can be arranged, re-arranged, constructed and deconstructed as based on one own choice (Bordo, 1993). On Bearchell’s YouTube video entitled “DID I GAIN WEIGHT ON PURPOSE TO COMPETE at MISS UNIVERSE? | My body transformation journey,” she has noted,

“I was super confident in my interviews. I was really on stage even though I knew what people would be saying about me. I knew that I didn’t look like I did at Miss Universe Canada 2013. I knew that I didn’t look like I did at Miss Supranational, but I was more confident physically, mentally than ever been before and I wanted to showcase that. I wanted to showcase that I didn’t have to be size 2 and be competitive in this competition,” (Bearchell, 2018).

The argument emphasizing on ‘I was super confident in my interviews. I was really on stage even though I knew what people would be saying about me. I knew that I didn’t look like I did at Miss Universe Canada 2013. I

knew that I didn't look like I did at Miss Supranational, but I was more confident physically, mentally than ever been before' notes the point of the prevailing norm of slenderness in beauty pageants. The norm is derived from the ideal bodily types in the pageant which is slenderness. Since the aesthetic norm of body size is fundamental in beauty pageants, plus size has symbolized disobedience, including in Miss Universe.

For all that, the symbol of resistance is coded by Siera Bearchell by the utterance 'I wanted to showcase that I didn't have to be size 2 and be competitive in this competition'. There, Bearchell has implied that she has failed at embodying the dominant discourse of American slender ideal. She is unable to bring herself into the slender line where other contenders are able to. This symbolizes the way women are grouped based on their collective entity (Kuokkanen, 2012), the slender ideal. Therefore, the plus size figures have been neglected for not being ideals.

Meanwhile, Siera Bearchell, as the plus size contender in Miss Universe 2016, has resisted this normalization by glorifying inclusive plus size contender as the form of defying collective. The stressing points on 'I wanted to showcase that. I wanted to showcase that I didn't have to be size 2 and be competitive in this competition' discloses an individual freedom of body size requirements. Dworkin (as cited in Bordo, 1993) has suggested the definition of own dimensions of physical freedom. From Dworkin's perspective, Siera Bearchell has defined her dimensions of physical freedom. 'I didn't have to be in size 2' is coded as a sign whereas she focuses on cultural resistance of bodily ideal rather than to be in the dominant size in the name of ideal femininity. Again, another form of resistance is performed by Siera Bearchell. On the same title of the YouTube video, she has claimed,

"I decided to go with the body that I had and to enjoy the experience and to just represent myself and represent who didn't necessarily fit to the mold of whatever area she's in and you can just go out there and be yourself, love yourself and show the world that you're not the same as everybody else. I was what drove me throughout the competition that's what helped me to throw all negative comments and messages that I received," (Bearchell, 2018).

To borrow Bordo's term 'go against the grain', Siera Bearchell has resisted the normalized idea of slender contenders through a risk of being plus size contender. 'I decided to go with the body that I had' represents that she has not only resisted the normalization of the slender ideal through texts, only defining the individual freedom, but has taken another path to join Miss Universe with the plus size body that she has. By trying to crack the dominant form, the dominant form is resisted by Siera Bearchell. With this argumentative explanation 'you can just go out there and be yourself, love yourself and show the world that you're not the same as everybody else,' adds up to the moment in which body cannot be assessed objectively. Body, as Bordo (1993) has theorized, is freighted with personal meaning and can only be determined by the subjects who live within it. In the realm of body size, Siera Bearchell has argued that everyone is not the same.

To make it clearer, everyone's body cannot be in the same exact size. Siera Bearchell has resisted the normalization by glorifying her different body size. She has brought the difference by not merging with the normal. Even women are still held to ideal beauty standards and American cultural definition of beauty standards have not been wide open (Gay, 2018), Siera Bearchell has still stood up to embody her plus size side as a symbol of cultural resistance of feminine ideal in Miss Universe. Therefore, Siera Bearchell has pointed up the issue that women need to voice up their concerns about social issues. That means, by speaking up, she has asked other women in general who feel the same way to consider the same path.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

By developing an analysis of Siera Bearchell as the embodiment of cultural resistance of American feminine ideals, this research has shown that Siera Bearchell embodies cultural resistance of bodily ideal in the guise of femininity by the constant performance of resisting the normalized American slender ideal in Miss Universe. Building upon Susan Bordo's (1993) analytical focus on the politics of the body, this research has investigated that the presence of Siera Bearchell as the Canadian plus size contender in Miss Universe can resist the American slender ideal. While other contenders' presentation gravitates toward their pursuit of slenderness in the American beauty pageant, this research has examined that Siera Bearchell's performances of working outs, eating healthy and joining Miss Universe with her plus size body has delivered a new meaning that body becomes as a site of pleasure, personal space, freedom, and choice. This research has also explored that Siera Bearchell does not rely on people's interference in seeing her body size to join Miss Universe. This research has also showcased those feminine ideals of slenderness, for Siera Bearchell, is neither a closure nor a fixed matter, but it can be changed through negating the politics of body size where the American dominant ideal of slenderness has been transmitted into the pageant. This research has shown that American ideal of slenderness as a measurement of femininity has been negated for the sake of cultural resistance. Thus, it would be fruitful to pursue future research about the way cultural resistance may influence other contenders in order to see how collective pageant contenders perceive the presence of cultural resistance happening in beauty pageantry.



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