

## ***Selena: A Screenplay Exploring Adult Women's Body Image Issue***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Body image dissatisfaction is a heavy issue that a lot of women face, yet it lacks perspectives in the eyes of the media. Instead, the issues are more focused on younger, more adolescent girls' point of view. This lack of depth contributes to a shallower understanding of body image issues since women from many other walks of lives also experience the same thing. This mission is what creative work strives for. Using the Self-Discrepancy theory, it explores how body image issues appear in an adult woman's life, how it affects it, as well as how she learns to overcome the problem. The film is emotional with a dash of magic in it, so it falls under the drama and low fantasy genre.

**Keywords:** body image issues; self-discrepancy; adult women; drama; low fantasy

### **INTRODUCTION**

Beauty is a subjective matter that has seen so much rigidity around it when it comes to women. This, therefore, has plagued many women in their lives, damning them in the impossible search for an unattainable body. According to the Mental Health Foundation (n.d.), over a third of adults in the UK have felt anxious or depressed regarding their body images, with 34% reported feeling anxious and 35% feeling depressed. A more recent study from Jackson et al. (2014) that sampled 405 Caucasian and African American middle-aged women found that 47% of them were dissatisfied with themselves, and 73% of them reported being at least somewhat unhappy with the way their bodies look. All of this points to the universality of the issue.

Brazier and White (2022) stated that body image refers to a person's emotional attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of their own body. As an issue, it has been cracked open and discussed by many over the years. However, not much has been said by the media about the body insecurities that older women also face today. The media, particularly the film industry, puts the spotlight mainly on younger, more adolescent girls. Some recent films, for example, like *To the Bone* (Noxon, 2017), *Dumplin'* (Fletcher, 2018), and *Imperfect* (Prakarsa, 2019) are all centered around a young protagonist and the body image struggles from the perspectives of younger women. In another form of media, research from Bessenoff and Del Priore (2007) that analyzed eleven magazines found that older women are barely represented in any of them. Unlike their younger counterparts, older women do not typically make the cut for front covers, but when they do, they are represented poorly. The models in the images do not appear as thin and their clothes are more conservative than the images of models served for younger women. They believe these contribute to the steady levels of body insecurities throughout a woman's lifespan.

This is why in my creative work, I focused on adult women's perspective on the matter. The general public barely knows anything about the struggles that the issue brings up when

these girls grow up. As a fully functioning adult, she has several important life aspects that she needs to tend to that takes her away from focusing on herself and her well-being. According to Kilpela et al. (2015), an adult woman's body dissatisfaction comes from their usual life priorities, physiological factors, as well as psychological changes like employment, household obligations, child and/or elder care, or other life stressors. This can happen since other priorities can deter attention and care away from the body. Pregnancy is also a big contributor to this issue. It is an arduous process that creates a lot of immediate changes within a woman's body, and its effects can sometimes last way longer after the pregnancy has ended. One in every four women are reported to gain five kilograms even a year after giving birth, and a professor of maternal and child nutrition at Cornell University, Kathleen Rasmussen, even said that a woman would retain one or two kilograms of weight after having a baby (Miller, 2016). This weight gain might affect the perkiness of the woman's breast and cause it to droop. Not to mention, the extra weight the woman must carry while she is pregnant will flatten out her feet, so by the end of her pregnancy, she would also permanently have bigger feet (Geggel & Harvey, 2022). Fear of aging is also a great factor in a grown woman's bodily insecurities. As they get older, women must go through changes within their bodies: a shift of fat distribution towards the torso, increased body fat, decrease in muscle mass, changes in skin color as well as elasticity and hair appearance, such as graying and thinning (Evans & Lexell, 1995; Medline Plus, n.d.; Situm et al., 2010; Tchkonja et al., 2010). In general, the older a woman becomes, her body will start to lose attractive physical traits that their younger selves possess. These changes can greatly affect the way they see themselves negatively, especially when the result of this shift is having a body that is drifting away from what society deems as ideal.

Even in a modern setting such as today, with body-positive messages spread all across the internet globally, women are still anxious over their bodies. On one hand, it is a growingly popular movement with around thirteen million posts on social media dedicated to the cause (West & Bethany, 2022). Even so, decades-old sets of standards do not wash away easily. There is still a lot of focus for women to look young and thin to be considered attractive. Features like a thinner build, small face yet big eyes, as well as curves made by large breasts and bottoms (Bogilates, 2019) are still used as frame of references when a woman tries to form an opinion about herself. Other than that, social media also breeds insecurities. The liberty to share everything resulted in adult women posting edited, curated versions of themselves, exposing their peers to a plethora of examples of what their bodies should look like, which prompts them to compare themselves before doing the same thing on their own platforms to feel good about themselves. It is a never-ending vicious cycle. The UK Parliament's (n.d.) The Women and Equalities committee conducted a survey in 2020 with 7,878 responses stating that seven out of ten adults feel ashamed of the way they look, with less than three being happy about themselves. When asked about what would help them feel more positive with their bodies, they said that the lesser time they spend on social media, the happier they are. In a video posted by The Try Guys (2021), three adult women were challenged to post undoctored, revealing photos of themselves on Instagram for a week. When asked to pick the photos to be posted, the anxiety over how they look is very apparent (The Try Guys, 2021, 10:12-13:50). Each woman looked physically uncomfortable when a picture of themselves was shown on screen and they immediately started putting themselves down by listing unflattering parts of their bodies that they are not comfortable with, like stomach rolls, uneven or flat breasts, and stretch marks. The evidence goes to show that there is pressure to look a certain way perpetuated by social media.

Body image issues will affect a woman's life negatively in a lot of ways. A negative view on one's body often leads to a lower self-esteem (Lawler & Young, 2022). In the long run, this could lead to self-isolation that hinders their communicative abilities with the people in their lives (Heath, 2022). They can also develop body dysmorphic disorders, disordered eating,

or mood disorders (Stanborough & White, 2020). In some cases, it can also lead to desperate attempts in the name of looking different, like uploading extremely-photoshopped photos on Instagram or undergoing plastic surgeries. It is a serious issue that needs to be dealt with, because its effects can disrupt a woman's life completely.

The creative work is in the form of a screenplay for I believe it benefits the story to be told that way. For one, it works best with the issue I am bringing up. Body image dissatisfaction is a very visual problem. The issue, at its core, discusses how one looks at their body as well as what they do not like about it. As it deals with a lot of the physical aspect of one's self, the topic of the creative work can benefit from the visual nature that a screenplay possesses. Using this specific format will not only allow the audience to understand what they think they look like, but they also get to see how they actually look as well as which particular set of figures they idealize. Seeing these head-on, instead of reading about them through prose would make for more effective engagement and overall generate more impact for the audience. I also chose it for its popularity among the people. In 2017, Indonesia enjoyed 42.7 million movie-goers, with 35% of them watching Indonesian films, a statistic that baffled the prediction of the year prior to it (Syarizka, 2018). The creative work can benefit from this popularity, because then, the message of the story can reach many more minds through the medium.

The work will feature a mixture of two genres: drama and low fantasy. Drama is serious in tone and realistic in its depictions of events. It has such a focus for humane struggles that as a heavy topic of discussion, the story can benefit from having drama as its genre. The story also adds a dash of magic in it. This is why I also used low fantasy into the mix. The genre revolves around events that do not happen in the scientific world. There is no particular reason why the magic occurs, and authors create a system of limited logic for it to live and breathe, which is only applicable in the story and not in the real world. Low fantasy slips into everyday life in the world we all are familiar with, intruding the mundane and introducing the magic. The placement of this genre is crucial, because the story needed it to visually and metaphorically convey the importance of self-love and appreciating our bodies as is.

This creative work seeks to be beneficial in several ways. For one, it serves as a lesson to actively choose ourselves and appreciate the form that we currently have. It is not an easy lesson, however it is one we all must learn. In the same spirit, the work reminds the audience to focus less on physical beauty, and more on other more fulfilling things in their lives. It also provides an exchange of perspectives on both sides of the matter. The loved ones can see exactly why and how their bodies make them feel miserable, and the sufferers themselves can also see how their hurt and misery can affect the lives of the people around them. Other than that, the work can help broaden the conversation regarding body image in the media, as well as the Indonesian movie landscape with the unique fusion of genres.

To guide the story, I used the psychological approach through the Self-Discrepancy theory. This theory posits that emotional problems are caused by discrepancies between differing self-states. It believes that everyone has three domains of the self: actual, ideal, and ought selves, and that these can be seen from two different perspectives: self and other, which sums up six different self-states (Higgins, 1987). Discrepancies between different sets of pairs of them can generate a distinct kind of emotional discomfort, with ideal discrepancies showing dejection-related emotions, and ought discrepancies with agitated-related emotions (Higgins, 1987). How badly someone is affected by self-discrepancy can be measured from the availability and accessibility of said self-discrepancy. It talked about how the severity of the issue depends on how much divergence between attributes from two different self-states, how

recent and frequent these discrepancies are activated, as well as the attributes' relational negative context with the external events that happens. The only way out of this problem, according to the theory, is by minimizing the discrepancy through changing one's self perception to be less discrepant than their dominant self-guides or the other way around. Another alternative is to minimize the accessibility of the discrepancy.

For this work, I used primary and secondary research. For the sake of realism, I asked a few older female family members as well as seeking out some other middle-aged women for their own experiences. I combed through endless journals and articles that talk about the issue at hand as well as watching movies to better understand the problem being discussed. Watching these films also helped me learn the style with which to write the creative work. It helped me set a better tone and pacing for the story.

## CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

As I have mentioned before, the work will be a mixture of two genres, which are drama and low fantasy. The raw perspective on the lives of mankind that the drama genre possesses will come the most alive during the arguments and moments of conflict within the story. Besides that, drama is also a genre that highlights the significance of human relations. This could inspire the dynamics between the protagonist and the people in her life. The genre can be realized through the way the relationships will break because of the conflicts and how they are repaired at the end. It can also take on the role of helping the audience see the depths of the characters' psyche. Coupling that, I used low fantasy to further complicate the events that happen within the storyline. In the story, the main character meets her younger self. This, in turn, breeds an interesting dynamic for the main character's psyche in terms of her dilemma with her body. This allows for a unique chance of self-reflection. The fusion of past and present within the creative work also helps the audience see where the protagonist's internal problem starts and how that is still currently affecting her life. Fantasy stories with time slips help readers to understand the present can be influenced by things in the past. It can also help them find answers to unresolved problems (Temple et al., 1997). The story wants to stress the fact that being hyper-critical of ourselves comes very easy, and we do it very often, because we think the criticism we throw at ourselves helps us be better. Because it is our own selves, it is easy to overlook the harm it can cause. The screenplay will challenge that notion by letting the protagonist physically meet herself and face the consequences of her negative view on herself. This creative work strives to serve as a reminder that the hurtful things we say to ourselves can have negative ramifications by using this genre to try to visualize that.

### Premise

At the time when a 36-year-old woman's insecurities towards her body are triggered again after her most recent birth, she mysteriously gets in touch with a young woman called Luna with whom she surprisingly connects with really well. The closer both of them get, the more the woman sees herself in that girl, and at the end, she learns how to accept herself through her.

### Creative Principle

I want to show how adult women struggle with their bodies and how it can affect aspects of her life she has worked to build: her marriage, family, career, and most importantly her own self, and how she learns to overcome it.

## Synopsis

When Selena was eighteen years old, she made the risky decision to undergo plastic surgery in a really sketchy establishment. She almost had it done when a mysterious figure stops the operation for her midway. Today, Selena is 36 years old. Her husband, Liam and her run a photography company together, and recently they have just welcomed their newborn twins into the world. It does not take long for Selena to arrive at the conclusion that she has lost much of her attractiveness because of her recent pregnancy as well as the fact that she is growing old, especially after her aunt comes to visit her and callously points it all out. In another part of town, a young woman named Luna goes to a party at a club downtown at the behest of her new, popular friend. She comes back home completely drunk, which causes her to send a message accidentally and drunkenly to a random number.

In her workplace, Selena's company is struggling financially, and an endorsement with a famous online influencer is set up. However, this influencer is everything Selena wishes she could be, so working with her only makes her insecurities even worse. This triggers an irrational behavior that Selena takes up: getting obsessed with editing photos to seek validation online. As Selena is dwindling down in self-esteem, by fate, she receives the drunken text that Luna has sent. The two become acquainted with one another, and they quickly bond over their issues with their bodies. As the days go by, Selena's perception of herself worsens, but her interactions with Luna lets her forget that she is an old miserable hag for a while. She has an outlet to vent about how miserable she feels about herself. During their conversations, Luna talks about a boy who she is seeing called Albert, and though she is wary about him at first, Selena advises her to go for it anyway.

Selena's obsession with her body and herself makes her lose focus both at home and at work, and this costs her: her company is under fire and her children become neglected, which ultimately prompts a serious rift between her and her husband. Around this time, things between Luna and Albert get serious, but to Luna's shock, Albert finally reveals his true colors and admits to tricking and using her. In this crucial moment of her life, Luna reaches out for help to Selena, but as she is dealing with her own stuff, she hangs up on her. The overwhelming sadness drives Luna to make the rash decision to go to a beauty clinic to undergo surgery. In their last phone call, Selena figures out that Luna is actually her eighteen-year-old self, and that she is about to make the same mistake she made eighteen years ago. Selena races to the clinic, where she actually meets Luna. In their first, actual meeting, Selena tries to convince Luna why she should not go through with the operation, while Luna brutally reminds Selena that if she does not do so, she will regret it the way Selena actively regrets her body every day. Here, Selena finally learns the importance of loving your body and she honestly tells Luna that she is beautiful for the first time, which successfully stops Luna from going through with the surgery. Selena comes home that night with a fresh new perspective, and from that point on, she tries to reframe her way of thinking and tries to show up more both at home and at work.

## Characters

Main characters:

- **Selena Tanjung**

Is a Chinese-Indonesian woman. An important detail about her is the crescent-shaped birthmark that she has on a corner of her abdomen. This was why her mother named her Selena, after the goddess of the moon. Compared to her peers, Selena falls on the shorter side. She has a naturally chubby face, wavy hair, and a slow metabolism, so her fat tends to get stored more easily than getting rid of. This is shown physically in her

thick limbs and with the visible excess fat that is showing on her stomach. After her pregnancy, her tummy is riddled with stretch marks and surgery stitches from her C-section. Even though her body is not proportionate, Selena is not obese or overweight, and is still considered having a normal build. She is Liam's wife as well as mother to her twins: Maddie and Mason. She works as the Creative Director and also Founder of a photography team that she and Liam created. Compared to her husband, Selena is more reserved as a person, but also a perfectionist and an overthinker.

- **Luna**

Luna is Selena's 18-year-old past self, but for the most part in this story, she will act as a separate entity from Selena. This is due to the nature of the story. When Selena was young, she really liked the name Luna, so she would sometimes introduce herself as Luna rather than her actual name, so she could be different while also still somewhat be the same. She likes the name as it still holds the same meaning as her real name. She sometimes also uses that name to sort of escape from herself. Luna shares Selena's history as well as parts of her personality that was present when Selena was Luna's age. Physically, she shares most of her features with Selena.

- **Liam Tanjaya**

Is a Chinese-Indonesian man who has known Selena since she was a senior in high school. Liam is Selena's husband as well as the father of her children. He has an average height and weight, with a curly mane on top of his head. His eyes are big and his smile is friendly. He works with Selena and acts as Co-Founder within the team. As a person, Liam is playful and patient. He thinks by logic. He is almost always cool and level-headed. His mind is never cluttered, and when there is trouble, he fixes it there and then so there is no burden on his shoulders.

Supporting characters:

- **Tante Ani**

Tante Ani is Selena's father's younger sister. She looks well-groomed and arguably younger than her age. She is slim, and she dyes her hair black, so it hides the gray strands. She has conservative Asian beliefs in which family comes first, and that the younger ones need their elders to guide them on what is right and wrong. Her conservative beliefs also lend her her traditional beauty standards as well as insisting on a woman's priority to manage their physical looks. Aunt Ani also always speaks what is on her mind and is not afraid of people getting offended.

- **Jessica Sinclair**

Jessica is a Chinese-Indonesian woman who marries into the prestigious Sinclair family. She has long locks of hair and is skinny. She has fair skin, a defined jaw, and is considered tall among her peers. She is stylish and does not shy away from flaunting her wealth through her choices of clothing. Jessica has an online presence and following for posting content about her life as a devoted housewife and mother to her newborn baby twins. She has tendencies to be narcissistic because of the amount of attention she has had since she was young. Being rich and conventionally pretty, she lives in her own bubble and tends to prioritize appearances above everything else. Because of this, she can also be condescending at times.

- **Albert Efraim**

Albert is half Chinese and half Dutch. He has buzz-cut hair and a structured jaw. He is tall and lean in build. The boy has many friends and is quite popular. He is selfish and shallow. He does things only for himself.

### **Conflict**

This screenplay will bring up the conflict of Man versus Self. This is the kind of conflict that happens when the character themselves is their own enemy (Kantey, n.d). A lot of aspects of body image dissatisfaction deal with a person's internal struggles with themselves. This type of conflict does push the question of whether that person is going to overcome their inner struggle or not, and the topic of my screenplay will also indirectly answer this question. Another type of conflict that will be implemented into the story is Man versus Man. According to Craiker (2022), it is a kind of conflict that pits two characters against one another. In the story, the protagonist will have such figures to create the contrast of herself. Having these other characters to represent what society deems as attractive and beautiful to bounce off the protagonist who does not necessarily fit the bill will help the protagonists reach a turning point in her self-inflicted conflict.

### **CONCLUSION**

Selena's body image issue is the result of an actual/ideal self-discrepancy. For her, the pinnacle of attractiveness is the ability to maintain a youthful façade, as well as having a small and slim figure, yet she looks nothing like that. This is then perpetuated by other people in her life, and the more she is exposed to it, the more vulnerable she becomes, and the more her self-discrepancy solidifies. Selena's body image dissatisfaction then affects her life, both at work and at home. Actual/ideal discrepancies generate dejection-related emotions (Higgins, 1987), which is close to depressive symptoms, and that is what Selena goes through in the screenplay. Her growing depression caused by feelings of entrapment in her own body leads her to neglect her duties as a mother and as a boss, which in turn makes her neglect her husband, who has to take care of these things that they had created together, as well as ignoring him as her partner. Her encounter with Luna helped a great deal in fundamentally changing her point of view. Seeing her go through the dark path she took eighteen years ago made her realize the gravity of what she says and believes about herself. Through the experience, Selena decided to try to minimize her self-discrepancy by changing her actual self-state to be closer to her ideal one. Not only that, but she also tries to minimize the discrepancy's accessibility by focusing on her family and career, the two important things in her life.

There are many things that I learned from this process. I learned a different way of looking at my own bodily insecurities through Self-Discrepancy theory that is more liberating. Looking at them as attributes from differing self-states gives me back the power to choose which set of attributes I want to dedicate myself more to. Making this thesis also helped me learn more on how to make a screenplay. I have never made a script in this scale before, so it was a challenge to figure out the pacing of things. Other than that, this process has been an incredible exercise of character for me. The many low points and obstacles that I faced, both internal and external, helped shape me to be better and stronger. I learned to be more disciplined with my time, have a thicker skin, and a braver heart.

I am proud to have made the screenplay and to have finished this thesis. However, it is not perfect. If I were given more time in the future, I would like to develop the story even further, and turn it into a ninety-minute project. This plan will ensure a nicer, more proper pacing of the story. This plan will also allow me to flush out the characters more so the story

would feel more whole. Afterwards, I can try to pitch the story to studios or producers who are looking to make a film.

My suggestion for future writers is to pick a topic that speaks to them. They will be naturally curious about the topic, and this inherent interest in the subject matter will carry them through the hardest days of thesis-writing, and there will be many of those in the coming months. I would also suggest they really consider before using drama as their genre, only because it is a broad concept and finding credible sources to back their arguments could be a challenge that hinders the process as a whole. In terms of the issue, future writers can try to find a different, more niche angle to tackle the issue to make it unique and interesting to read. Lastly, if any future writers wish to create a story centering around a character that is not personally familiar to them, I suggest they should talk to some people that do resemble your character in one way or another, for it can add more authenticity to their story later on.

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