

Global Femininities: India, Bollywood Actresses and Postfeminism

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Abstract

This project looks at existing theoretical work on postfeminism and femininities, specifically with the intention of locating such theoretical discourses outside of western constructions and frameworks. As a result of much of the current work on this topic tending to theorise experience in the western world, this thesis critically examines Indian mainstream popular media content about Bollywood and the women who occupy that space to properly understand the ways in which gender manifests in that context. Using existing theoretical discussions from postfeminism, celebrity culture, affect and femininities, this project considers how gender is constructed and disseminated to audiences via media content about Bollywood actresses.

The analytical discussions of the project form three key chapters all of which are organised in a dual thematic approach. Each chapter has an overarching theme that is applicable to the chapter in its entirety. These overarching themes are (i) femininity and work, (ii) bodily femininity and (iii) femininity and love. Through these themes one is able to get a multifaceted sense of idealised femininity relating to key areas of gender performance as identified by the mainstream media considered. However, within each of these thematic chapters, analysis is then further organised in relation to content about young women, wives and mothers. This links to the influence drawn from the work of Angela McRobbie (2003 originally published in 1978) that asserts that the media categorize the lives of women disseminating varied yet specific content to women within these different categories as part of properly micromanaging ideal gender performance that is taught via media content as a whole. As a result, in drawing from these findings of McRobbie but moving away from western examples, the project presents the nuance of contemporary urban Indian femininity(ies) in great detail. This is done via considering how it manifests as a whole while also tracking its progression and shifts as women move along the idealised hegemonic trajectory from youth to wifehood to motherhood.