Is Fat Still a Feminist Issue? the Selling of Hope, Fear, and Resistance At the Movies

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ABSTRACT
Fairy tales can come true; it can happen to you. Recently a small number of fairy tale movies have been released that convey you do not need to be thin to be beautiful and to live happily ever after. Two of these movies, Bridget Jones’s Diary and Shrek, achieved phenomenal box office success. This essay presents a feminist critique of these two movies in their claim to challenge the moral and ideological issue that fat is the antithesis of beauty in today’s Western world. These two movies sell hope by convincing the audience that “ugly ducklings” can find love, but they also sustain the fear of being fat in today’s predominately white, Christianvalue, capitalistic, patriarchal society through the images presented of their female characters. As such, resistance to this dominant ideology and morality that equates thin to beauty and health, and fat to ugly and unhealthy, is difficult.

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Fairy tales can come true; it can happen to you. Recently a small number of fairy tale movies have been released that convey you do not need to be thin to be beautiful and to live happily ever after. Two of these movies, Bridget Jones’s Diary and Shrek, achieved phenomenal box office success. This essay presents a feminist critique of these two movies in their claim to challenge the moral and ideological issue that fat is the antithesis of beauty in today’s Western world. These two movies sell hope by convincing the audience that “ugly ducklings” can find love, but they also sustain the fear of being fat in today’s predominately white, Christian-value, capitalistic, patriarchal society through the images presented of their female characters. As such, resistance to this dominant ideology and morality that equates thin to beauty and health, and fat to ugly and unhealthy, is difficult.

After Shrek and Princess Fiona kiss, the spell is lifted and she is permanently transformed to her ogre self.

Princess Fiona: I don’t understand.
I’m supposed to be beautiful.
Shrek: But you are beautiful.

Ahhh...the feel-good ending of the blockbuster animated movie, Shrek. In this modern-day fairy tale the female lead character, Princess Fiona (voiced by Hollywood beauty Cameron Diaz), does not achieve her life-long goal of attaining permanent beauty by having the magic curse (beautiful by day / ugly at night) reversed. However, she receives true love and acceptance from Shrek (the male lead voiced by comedian Mike Myers) because she is like him: a fat, ugly, socially-disgusting, green ogre. This is the two-pronged message conveyed to audiences world-wide; it is fearful to be different due to the rejection you will receive from society, so strive for perfection, and hope that someone else (e.g., your prince) will love and accept you as you are, flaws and all.

Bridget Jones’s Diary is another popular movie with fairy-tale elements and a similar theme. The female lead character, Bridget Jones (played by the normally thin and beautiful actress Renée Zellweger), strives to change her appearance (i.e., lose weight) and bad habits (excessive drinking, talking, and smoking) to garner the attention of men. She fears she will become a spinster, but alas has hope for finally attaining true love when her prince/good guy, human-rights lawyer
(played by Colin Firth) declares he “likes her, just as she is.”

The purpose of this essay is to analyze how these hit movies illustrate that fat is still a feminist issue that needs to be addressed. While these movies ultimately show overweight, socially undesirable women receive a fairy-tale ending (i.e., true love), the female (not male) characters are required to undergo intense physical and emotional change to try to alter their appearance (i.e., become thin and beautiful) and behaviors (e.g., improved social skills and feminine grace). Women and other groups are often stigmatized, ridiculed, and ostracized for their traits and behaviors (e.g., being fat, poor, disabled, a minority) that make them different from the expectations and standards of health and beauty defined by the dominant white Western male culture (Bordo 1993; LeBesco 2004). The struggle between the pressure to conform to these ideals and having to endure, resist, and eventually accept oneself is a battle most of us are engaged in (Duke 2002; Germov and Williams 1999; Markula 2003). Consequences exist for us and the society members who impose these moralistic beliefs (LeBesco 2004).

THE IMMORALITY OF FATNESS

The analysis of these two fairy tales reveals the prevalence and power of white male supremacy and the pressure to conform to morality codes, including eradication of aberrant traits and behaviors. Ogres in *Shrek* are depicted having numerous negative traits and socially undesirable behaviors (i.e., fat, green, large/misshaped ears, crooked teeth, bad hygiene, bad manners, eat weird food, live in swamps). In addition, the male ogre, Shrek, is bald. The townspeople are afraid of Shrek and assume he will hurt them, so as a mob they attempt to attack him with their torches and pitchforks. Ogres are not the only race that are not accepted by the white humans; the ruler of Ducor, Lord Farquaad, issues a proclamation for citizens to capture all fairy-tale creatures, so they can be placed “under arrest to be transported to a resettlement facility.” Lord Farquaad is adamant and ruthless about the eviction of all who are different. He captures and tears off the legs of a fairy-tale creature, the Gingerbread Man and says, “I’m not a monster—you are, and the rest of them fairy-tale trash poisoning my perfect world. Now tell me, where are the others?” In addition, when Lord Farquaad initially sees Shrek he hates him and tries to have him killed:

> [At first sight of Shrek]
> Lord Farquaad: Who is that? It’s hideous!
> Shrek: That’s not very nice.
> Lord Farquaad: Knights, new plan. The one who kills the ogre will be named Champion.
> Shrek: Come on, can’t we just settle this over a pint? No? Well, okay then.
> [Shrek defeats the knights. The crowd cheers and Shrek takes a bow.]

Throughout the rest of the movie, Lord Farquaad refers to ogres as “it” and not as him or her. He refuses to respect them as beings who have feelings and dignity.

In *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, Bridget Jones exhibits socially undesirable behaviors. The
mothers of Bridget Jones and Mark Darcy encourage them to go on a blind date together. Bridget accidentally overhears Mark say, “Mother, I do not need a blind date—particularly not some verbally-incompetent spinster who smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish, and dresses like her mother.” Bridget feels embarrassed and ashamed and pledges to herself:

That was it. That was the moment I suddenly realized that unless something changed soon I was going to live a life where my major relationship was with a bottle of wine and I’d finally die fat and alone and be found three weeks later half eaten by wild dogs, or I was about to turn into Glenn Close in Fatal Attraction.

This proclamation motivates Bridget to try to lose weight and to reduce the amount of alcohol and cigarettes she consumes. To monitor the results she tracks her progress on a daily basis in her diary. While Bridget’s self-esteem was momentarily improved during the fling with her womanizing boss, Daniel Cleaver (played by Hugh Grant), Bridget is devastated when she catches him having sex with Laura, a young US executive portrayed by a thin, beautiful actress. Looking smirk, Laura says to Daniel (in front of Bridget), “I thought you said she was thin.” Daniel does not reply or try to comfort Bridget, who then spends hours crying and wandering the streets. The next time Bridget sees Daniel at work, he tells her that he and Laura are engaged. That evening Bridget says to herself:

At times like this continuing with one’s life seems impossible and eating the entire contents of one’s fridge seems inevitable. I have two choices: to give up and accept permanent state of spinsterhood and eventual eating by dogs or not. And this time I choose not. I will not be defeated by a bad man and an American stick insect.

On Bridget’s refrigerator door are pictures of where her face has been cut out and placed over the heads of magazine pictures of thin, sexy models. She also begins to earnestly engage in her diet and exercise regime.

The characters in Shrek and Bridget Jones’s Diary provide examples of the humiliation and shame that is felt due to the ridicule and peer pressure put on them to lose weight (and to look perfect). Fatness is currently considered to be a major ill of society; a deviant trait to be eliminated (Campos 2004; Gard and Wright 2005; LeBesco 2004).

The Sin of Being Fat

The obsession with body weight and health is based on morality and ideology (Campos 2004; Gard and Wright 2005; LeBesco 2004). In Western culture fatness is currently considered to be “socially sinful;” unlike prior centuries (1890 and before) when it was judged as a highly aesthetic and desirable form (Kersh and Morone 2002). People no longer have self-discipline or moral fiber to resist modern-day temptations. They have become lazy and selfish and are to blame for their overweight or obese condition (Baumeister 2002).

Since the late 1800’s, tolerance for body weight and fatness narrowed causing obesity to be viewed as defiant. This led to dieting and weight loss as pathways to body redemption (Schwartz 1986). Nineteenth century health reformers linked physical and moral health. They saw hygiene as a sign of improved morality. Health reforms of weight training, vegetarianism, special health foods, body-building, exercise, and physical education became a “hygienic religion” (Conrad 1994). Hygiene was thought to
“exalt the individual’s moral character” (Whorton 1982, 6). This “clean-living movement” during the nineteenth century was “as much about moral regeneration and secular salvation as it was about health improvement” (Conrad 1994, 388). Nichter and Nichter (1991) also found weight, dieting, and health linked through a moral fiber. Dieting can be seen as a virtual battle between good and evil:

Concordant with the ritualistic nature of the wellness syndrome, forces of good (slimness) and evil (fatness) are pitted against each other in a morality play which takes the form of getting in shape (Nichter and Nichter 1991, 256).

Citizenship and Fatness

Those who are fat are often negatively perceived as being unproductive citizens in society. Fatness is seen as a plague to society (Campos 2004; Gard and Wright 2005) and to American (and Western) citizenship (LeBesco 2004). To be fat is to fail to do one’s duty as a productive worker in a capitalist economy (LeBesco 2004). Fatness also marks one as not being a citizen in the dominant socioeconomic class (Campos 2004; Joanisse and Synnott 1999; LeBesco 2004). This can only be achieved when one has the appropriate body shape. It is often only attainable by the rich, ruling class that has enough free time and money to create this idealized body (LeBesco 2004).

Body shape expectations are particularly pronounced for women. The thin and toned body is a commodity greatly sought after in America (Joanisse and Synnott 1999). “Within the context of a consumer market economy, female bodies are differentiated from each other simply to augment market potential” (Russo 1995, 23). Fatness is an important signifier of demarcation (Campos 2004; LeBesco 2004). This notion is communicated by the portrayal of Princess Fiona’s beautiful thin body in Shrek (an appropriate body type for a royal princess and thus suitable for a king). A beautiful female body has exchange value (Hirschman 1987). In Shrek, the “ownership” of a princess through marriage has the social power to elevate Lord Farquaad to king status. The Magic Mirror tells Lord Farquaad that to become a king, he needs to marry a princess:

[The Magic Mirror shows Lord Farquaad the eligible bachelorettes (i.e., Cinderella, Snow White, and Princess Fiona, referred to as the “fiery redhead.”)]

**Magic Mirror:** Lord Farquaad, you’ve chosen Princess Fiona.

**Lord Farquaad:** Princess Fiona—she’s PERFECT! All I have to do is find someone [cut off]

**Magic Mirror:** [nervous] But I probably should mention the little thing that happens at night, after sunset.

**Lord Farquaad:** Silence! I will make Princess Fiona my queen.

Princess Fiona also has important exchange value to Shrek. Since Lord Farquaad does not want to try to rescue Princess Fiona from the tower that is protected by the fire-breathing dragon himself, he makes a deal with Shrek. He will return Shrek’s swamp property to him (and remove the fairy-tale creatures from it) if Shrek successfully saves the princess and delivers her to him.

In Bridget Jones’s Diary, Bridget is happy to exchange her body, via sex, to get to go on a weekend trip to the country with her boyfriend, Daniel. She perceives his willingness to go on this trip (paid for with his money and time) to be an indication of
his romantic commitment to her. She says to herself:

Hooray! I’m no longer a ‘tragic spinster’ but proper girlfriend of bona fide sex god. So committed, that he’s taking me on a full blown mini-break holiday weekend….This can’t be just shagging; mini-break means true love…

During their weekend getaway, Daniel lies to Bridget and tells her he needs to return home for work purposes. Disappointed about his abandonment and the realization she will have to attend a Vicars and Tarts party alone, she arrives wearing a Playboy bunny costume. She feels humiliated because most guests are not in costume. The party theme is interesting because it supports the notion of Christian male superiority. Female party goers are expected to dress as Tarts (i.e., women who easily sell themselves in relationships – sluts). Bridget’s costume is especially symbolic of being a sex object (representative of a Playboy bunny playmate). Conversely, the (white) males are to portray themselves as Vicars, the pillars of society. Vicars are the ruling class who pass judgments on women and minorities and determine what is right and wrong in society.

Attitudes and Stigma against Fat

Social disapproval of fatness prevails today (e.g., Kersh and Morone 2002). Along a similar line as the earlier clean-living movement, Crandall (1994, 884) suggests that:

. . . holding antifat attitudes serves a value expressive function (Katz, 1960), reinforcing a worldview consistent with the Protestant work ethic, self determination, a belief in a just world, and the notion that people get what they deserve. . . [As such, people] tend to blame fat people for their weight and stigmatize them for it.

Attitudes toward fat individuals, for the most part, are negative (Crandall 1994; Morrison and O’Connor 1999). Fat people are not only viewed as being more self-indulgent, less self-disciplined and lazier than their thinner counterparts (Tiggemann and Rothblum 1988), they are perceived as being indecisive, disorganized, non-industrious, incompetent (Larkin and Pines 1979), unattractive, aesthetically displeasing, morally and emotionally impaired, alienated from their sexuality, discontent with themselves, “weak-willed,” unlikeable (Crandall 1994), lonely and isolated (Joanisse and Synnott 1999), asexual (Brook 1999), and immature requiring instant gratification (Wise and Wise 1979). Even positive stereotypes of fatness, for example, being funny and jolly, are often linked to negative perceptions of being fat (Notkin 1994).

Children also stigmatize heavier children, especially girls, as being lazy, lonely, sad, stupid, ugly, and dirty (Turnbull, Heaslip and McLeod 2000). Moreover, for children, being overweight is more negative than other types of stigma. Obese children are less liked compared to children with another stigma, such as a physical disability or wearing glasses (Sigelman, Miller and Whitworth 1986). Negative attitudes toward heavier children are more extreme as children grow older (Brylinsky and Moore 1994) unlike other types of stigma that are viewed more positively with aging (Sigelman, Miller and Whitworth 1986).

Not only do others perceive fat people as having negative characteristics and behaviors, but individuals personally tend to take on these negative associations if they see themselves as fat and ugly. As individuals we buy into it and internalize it, which lowers
our self esteem (Crandall 1994; Joanisse and Synnott 1999). A consumer (tsmith11169, Apr. 12, 2005) posted the following on the Bridget Jones’s Diary message board:

I have watched this movie millions of times with my mom …and we think Bridget’s body looks pretty damn good… sure she is not a stick but she represents a very healthy body which i don’t think you see too often. i do think it was kinda upsetting to me at least that she kept talking about her weight because i weigh about the same and am about the same height and i never really thought of myself as fat. seeing this movie, makes me feel fat though.

While fat people may not endorse anti-fat attitudes to the same extent as their lower weight counterparts (Morrison and O’Connor 1999), they often think of other fat people in these terms (Crandall 1994; Lerner and Korn 1972; Staffieri 1967). Examples from *Shrek* are shown below:

**Princess Fiona** is grateful to Shrek for rescuing her

**Princess Fiona:** …Thy deed is great and thy heart is pure. I am eternally in your debt…

**She asks him to remove his helmet, but he refuses**

**Princess Fiona:** Please. I would look upon the face of my rescuer.

**Shrek:** Oh no, you wouldn’t.

**After he removes his helmet**

**Princess Fiona:** …Oh no! This is all wrong! You’re not supposed to be an ogre.

**Donkey** finds **Princess Fiona** in her ogre form. He is scared and screams for help.

**Princess Fiona:** It’s okay, I’m the princess. It’s me in this body.

**Donkey:** Oh my God, you ATE the princess! …

**Princess Fiona:** This is me.

**Donkey:** Princess?! What happened to you? You’re a…different.

**Princess Fiona:** I’m ugly, okay?! …I’ve been this way as long as I can remember…

**Donkey:** I’ve never seen you like this before.

**Princess Fiona:** It only happens when the sun goes down. By night one way, by day another / This shall be the norm / Until you find true love's first kiss / Then… take love's true form. It’s a spell. When I was a little girl, a witch cast a spell on me. Every night I become THIS, this horrible, ugly beast…That’s why I have to marry Lord Farquaad tomorrow before the sun sets and he sees me like this.

**Donkey:** C’mon, princess, you're not that ugly. All right, you are ugly. But you're only like this at night. Shrek's ugly 24/7.

**Princess Fiona:** Donkey, I’m the princess, and this is not how a princess is supposed to look! …Princess and ugly don’t go together.

**Discrimination against Fat**

Fatness is associated with lower social economic status (Campos 2004; Sobal and Stunkard 1989) and racial and ethnic minorities (Campos 2004; LeBesco 2004). The bought-and- paid-for primped, thin, upper-class body, as opposed to the “natural” everyday body, currently signifies superiority and beauty in today’s Western society (LeBesco 2004). Fat people are viewed as being inferior, and as such, face discrimination (Campos 2004; Crandall 1994; Kersh and Morone 2002; LeBesco 2004).
These prejudices are extremely powerful (Crandall 1994; Kersh and Morone 2002; Joanisse and Synnott 1999). Fat people have unequal access to resources, including those that would be beneficial to their health. Negative feelings towards them may also cause disempowering health consequences (Joanisse and Synnott 1999; LeBesco 2004). Failure to meet cultural weight norms may incur dire social consequences, such as finding a romantic partner (Joanisse and Synnott 1999; Maurer and Sobal 1999), being accepted or funded at university (Crandall 1994; Kersh and Morone 2002), being hired or promoted at work (Joanisse and Synnott 1999; Kersh and Morone 2002; Maurer and Sobal 1999), and loss of social esteem (Kersh and Morone 2002). “The stigma of obesity infiltrates every area of a person’s life” (Joanisse and Synnott 1999, 59).

In Bridget Jones's Diary, Bridget feels inferior due to prejudice and social pressure for being overweight and unmarried. Bridget’s first television interview for her new job does not go well. The television camera was aimed under her short skirt as she was sliding down a fireman’s pole. Later that day as she looks at her calendar she says to herself:

Excellent. I’m a national laughing stock. Have a bottom the size of Brazil; am daughter of a broken home; am rubbish at everything, and, oh God, I’m having dinner at Magda and Jeremy’s [tonight]. The only thing worse than a smug married couple is lots of smug married couples.

At the dinner party the couples encourage her to hurry up and meet a guy because “tick-tock” (i.e., pregnancy cannot wait forever). A male at the party says to Bridget:

Seriously, though, offices are full of single girls in their 30’s, fine physical specimens, but they just can’t seem to hold down a chap. Why is that there are so many unmarried women in their 30’s these days, Bridget?

Everyone stares at her. She laughs nervously, “Oh, I don’t know. Suppose it doesn’t help that underneath our clothes our entire bodies are covered in scales.” No one else laughs.

After the dinner party Bridget is talking alone with Mark Darcy when his girlfriend rudely interrupts them and summons him (by snapping her fingers) to rejoin her and the other couples because they are discussing the law. The snobbery of being a highly educated, upper class elitist is evident, and Bridget is embarrassed again, because it is clear that she does not fit in with the others.

Some body weight researchers (e.g., Campos 2004; Crandall 1994; LeBesco 2004) argue that being fat is a tool of discrimination. LeBesco (2004) suggests that it is no coincidence that there is a disproportionately high level of overweight people in disempowered groups—especially women—in stigmatized racial and ethnic groups. In the USA, the highest proportions of overweight and obese people are African American women (78% overweight; 50.8% obese) and Mexican American women (71.8% overweight; 40.1% obese) (American Obesity Association 2005). In other Western countries, such as New Zealand, racial/ethnic women also top the list with Pacific Island women having the highest levels of obesity at 48% and Maori women at 28% (Ministry of Social Development 2005).

Discrimination against fat people can also be found in white supremacy attitudes. Anti-fat attitudes have similar disturbing characteristics to eugenics movements (Campos 2004; LeBesco 2004). “The racist power of internalized fat-phobia is a surefire tool to keep white bodies ’pure’ in shape and
size” (LeBesco 2004, 59). Seeing fat people can evoke racist anxieties of losing one’s privilege in society and becoming like other ethnic and minority groups (LeBesco 2004). In Shrek, there are several examples of Lord Farquaad’s racist attitudes:

[Lord Farquaad tells Princess Fiona]
Lord Farquaad: You don’t have to waste good manners on an ogre. It’s not like it has feelings.

[Shrek bursts into Fiona’s and Farquaad’s wedding]
Lord Farquaad: Now really, it's rude enough being alive when no one wants you, but showing up uninvited to a wedding?

[Donkey pleads with Shrek to let him stay in the swamp]
Donkey: Please. I don't wanna go back there. You don't know what it's like to be considered a freak... Well, maybe you do, but that's why we gotta stick together. You gotta let me stay!

In addition, to live in Lord Farquaad’s society of Duloc, one must conform to rules, which are sung to Shrek and Donkey by a choir of white boy and girl puppets who look exactly alike:

[Shrek and Donkey visit an information center at the entrance of Duloc]

Puppets at the Information Center: [singing to the Walt Disney World tune, “It’s a Small World”] Welcome to Duloc / Such a perfect town / Here we have some rules / Let us lay them down / Don't make waves / Stay in line / And we'll get along fine / Duloc is a perfect place / Please keep off of the grass / Shine your shoes / Wipe your... FACE. / Duloc is / Duloc is a perfect... place.

Hundreds of consumers who have seen Shrek have written comments on message boards about the movie. One person notes: [Duloc] represents a town that seems perfect, but you just have to take a sharp look at it and notice how horrible life really is there. The people are being controlled by their small, yet horrible lord. Like the viewers that are present at a show - they see "applaud"; they see "laugh"...it's what they see and what they do because others tell them. It's not something you can rely on. It's a manipulated society, something which does happen in our world too...much too often sometimes.

Feminist Work – Beauty and the Pursuit of Thinness

Feminist concerns regarding cultural expectations about body size, shape and weight gained focus in the 1980s. The gendered nature of eating disorders saw feminists theorize the body as a site of political struggle (Wykes and Gunter 2005). Feminist psychotherapists such as Susie Orbach (Fat is a Feminist Issue, 1978) and Kim Chernin (Womanise: The Tyranny of Slenderness, 1983) in their discussion of eating disorders first drew attention to this. They examined women’s obsessions with their weight, size of their body, and dieting. Orbach (1978) focused on why woman overeat so that they need to diet, while Chernin (1983) questioned why women living in a fat-phobic culture tried desperately to revise their bodies rather than demand that the culture reform its values.

Mainstream feminists have pointed out how media images of extreme thinness help
promote the current epidemic of eating disorders among girls and women (Campos 2004; Wykes and Gunter 2005). Feminists, such as Naomi Wolf (1991) and Susan Bordo (1993), have addressed how absurdly restrictive body ideals oppress women in general. Their focus, however, has been exclusively on the pressures faced by “thinner” rather than larger obese women who suffer far greater levels of discrimination (Campos 2004).

THE CONTRADICTORY MESSAGE OF THE FAIRY TALES

Bridget Jones’ Diary and Shrek are critically acclaimed fairy tales that have delivered a memorable message to a massive audience. Shrek, released in May 2001, generated gross worldwide revenues of over $487 million dollars. Its success spurred the creation of Shrek 2, which made nearly $1 billion dollars worldwide. Not surprising, the franchise continues with Shrek 3 scheduled for release in May 2007. Similarly, in 2001 Bridget Jones’s Diary achieved impressive box-office revenue ($280 million worldwide) and a sequel that was released in 2004.

Fairy-tale style movies are not designed simply for audience entertainment purposes. A fairy tale is a “literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that children [and adults] would become civilized according to the social code of the times” (Zipes 1983, 3). The first written fairy tales were based on “the morality and ethics of a male-dominated Christian civil order” (Zipes 1983, 9). They socialize children and adults on how to act in society, without disrupting society and causing trouble for oneself. They, however, are manipulative in that they: 1) serve cultural and personal politics, 2) present a certain image of society, and 3) adhere to the moralistic codes of the times written. (Escarpet 1981 as cited in Zipes 1983).

Additionally, movies in general “shape and express how we see – or don’t see – our bodies” (Holmlund 2002, 3). The consumption of personal appearance in the movies carries social messages and moral meanings (Holbrook, Block and Fitzsimons 1998).

Shrek and Bridget Jones’s Diary try to sell us the moral lesson that we do not need to conform to society’s expectations of thinness, beauty, and health in order to “find our prince” who will accept and love us for who we are. However, most of the time the women in these movies are torn between their desire to resist, and their inclination to conform to, the advice and directives from family, friends, and society about changing their appearance and behavior to be able to successfully attract a mate. In addition, the post-feminist message is conveyed that these women will only find happiness if they have a long-term relationship with a man (McRobbie 2004). Sadly, the “fairy-tale” message of the movie is “I like you very much, just as you are,” (characters Mark Darcy to Bridget Jones, Bridget Jones’s Diary), because in the real world women (and men) know that thinness and beauty are expected and often necessary to attract and retain desirable partners.

The public knows better. Although they portray fat characters (in person for Bridget Jones’s Diary and by voice for Shrek), the women cast in the lead roles look like models in real life. Casting directors intentionally choose thin, beautiful actresses to perform in the movies (Holmlund 2002). Renée Zellweger was in the media spotlight for her pre-taping weight gain transformation for Bridget Jones’s Diary and her stringent dieting regime to lose the weight afterward. Renée, like most women, feel the pressure to conform to society’s expectations and Hollywood standards. If she doesn’t stay thin
she risks losing her “beautiful” image by the public and opportunities for future employment. The topic of Renée’s (and character Bridget’s) weight is widely discussed on consumer message boards:

By film standards she is fat - but only coz most films are full of stick like size 4s!! Including Renee when she’s not Bridget! I think she looks fantastic as Bridget and I think it’s sad that she gets portrayed as fat … ’coz it doesn’t really help people who are insecure about their weight! I suppose it’s a bit different with Bridget though, ’coz they’re just portraying her character as a lot of us young women really are - not exactly fat but desperate to lose those extra pounds!!! (hannahstott, posted May 10, 2005)

The message fairy-tale movies like these try to sell to the audience are in conflict with what is really happening in the world. They sell us both hope and fear. As such, while the audience (mainly women) are receptive to this moral being proposed (i.e., we dream of this fairy tale world) we have too much to lose if we do not follow the dominant male values of women needing to be thin and beautiful. Hollywood is not immune; it knows that society expects them to produce movies that sell hope amidst the fear of rejection. As such, there is resistance to the moral that it is okay to be fat, because in the real world, there is typically not a happily-ever-after story for women (and men) who are fat. Why? Because “fatness marks the individual as a failed citizen in a number of different ways: as not of the dominant social class, as an inadequate worker and consumer.” (LeBesco 2004, 58-59).

[Shrek tells Donkey why a relationship between Princess Fiona and him wouldn’t work]

Shrek: …Because she’s a princess and I’m an ogre.

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