

## **Yes, I am a chubby girl.**

“All About That Bass” as an example to demonstrate

Women’s Bodies in the pop music world

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In the music world, musicians’ stage presentation plays an important role in the possibility of success, especially in popular music. The American and Asian society tend to celebrate skinny as a symbol of attractive for women; this leads to the fact that having a skinny body is necessary as a pop female singer. However, in the past few years, more and more female singers introduce the idea of walking through this “rule” that’s put on women by society, for example, Pink’s “*Fuckin*” 2010, Christina Aguilera’s “*Beautiful*” in 2002, Nicki Minaj’s “*Anaconda*” 2014<sup>1</sup>: they state that women should like how they look, and shouldn’t worry too much about what people think they should look like. In this paper, I am going to talk about this change with an example of the newest Grammy award nominated pop song, “*All About That Bass*” sang by Meghan Trainor.

“*All about that bass*” was released on June 30, 2014 in Meghan Trainor’s EP “*Title.*” Trainor and Kevin Kadish wrote it together to point out a positive idea of body image for their audiences. In this song, they used a lot of 1950s elements, such as doo-wop, because they both love this old-style, lighthearted atmosphere. And

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<sup>1</sup> Warwick, Jacqueline, “*He Hit Me, and I was Glad*”: Violence, Masochism, and Anger in Girl Group Music.” In *She’s So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence and Class in 1960s Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010,) 106-108.

Trainor also wrote the lyrics herself as self-acceptance of body type. She uses many-interesting metaphor's to connect women's bodies and music.

When this song first came out, it received multi critical reports saying that this is an "anti-feminism" piece. Obviously, "*All about that bass*" speaks for women; however, society linked feminism with "skinny", "girly", "quietly", which is completely different from the women type that this piece presents. In the following paragraph, I am going to analyze this piece with three aspects: Lyrics, Music, and Visual Performance.

### **Lyrics**

First of all, the title of this piece "*All about that bass*" hits the point directly. The "bass" here has different meanings, but all of them are connected together. In the music, bass means the lower musical line, or the lower instruments sounds, such as bass drum/kick drum or bass guitar. On the women body, it is a symbol for "butt", which can be considered as a thicker bodied girl. That is to say, Trainor states her idea through the topic of the song as "Yes, I am a chubby girl."

Also, in the verse "*I'm all about that bass, 'bout that bass, no treble*" bringing out the contrast of different body types. The word "treble" here also has different meaning, and it is also the opposite object from the word "bass." Treble in music means the higher melody or instrument setting, which is more recognizable in pop music audiences; it also symbolizes as a thinner girls' body.

Just focusing on these two different words, we can understand the connection of music and the women's body. In music, treble usually plays a main melody line and always brings out more than the bass line. In addition, treble line is always the

main thing and the first thing that audiences listen to. Referring this to a women’s body, people tend to like skinny girls more than thicker girls as their first impression. Here, Trainor also use homophonic of “treble” and “trouble” to state “bass is better.” Below is the table of the difference meanings between “bass” and “treble” in this piece.

	BASS	Treble
Music	Low Voice	Higher Voice
Body	Butt	
Female Body Type	Thicker girls Chubby girls	Skinny girls
Society Value	Less attractive	More attractive
Trainor’s value	Yes, that is ME	Trouble

Except putting so many hints into the title and the verse, Trainor also puts a lot of effort to claim that “Yes, I am a chubby girl, and I am proud of it.” For example, she sings “..., *I ain’t no size two, but I can shake it, shake it like I’m supposed to.*” In this sentence, we clearly understand that she separate herself from the value that all the girls chase – fit in size two, and she is also proud of her butt that she thinks is attractive and “*I got that boom boom that all the boys chase.*” Furthermore, according to Susan Bordo, women’s body shapes are naturally designed for creating and breeding later generations for our spices. That is why women have bigger waists, hips and Breasts compared to

men’s body.<sup>2</sup> Trainor also wrote, “*Yeah, my momma she told me don’t worry about your size*”, and “*Every inch of you is perfect from the bottom to the top*” to demonstrate the positive idea of women’s bodies. Below, I list a table of sentences and words from the lyrics that are either celebrating the thickness or diminishing the thinness.

<b>Celebration Thickness</b>	<b>Diminishing Thinness</b>
“ <i>Shake it like you supposed to</i> ”	Size too
“ <i>I got the boom boom that boys chase</i> ”	“ <i>I see the magazine working Photoshop. We know that isn’t real.</i> ”
“ <i>I am bringing booty back</i> ”	Stick-figure
“ <i>Every inch of you is perfect, from the bottom to the top</i> ”	Silicone Barbie doll
“ <i>boys they like a little more booty to hold at night</i> ”	Skinny Bitches
“ <i>don’t worry about your size</i> ”	

## **Music**

As this piece is promoting a positive idea, Kevin Kadish, the songwriter and producer, uses A Major through the piece. This links to the lyric and Trainor and Kadish’s passion of the 50s music style, they created a catchy bass line. Also, compared

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<sup>2</sup> Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1933).

to some popular female singers now, Trainor's voice is lower than the standard popular female singers, which perfectly fits the idea of this piece. In the whole piece, she also keeps her voice in the lower range until the end of the song, and in the end of the piece, she finally raised her voice to a higher range (but it still not like the soprano/virtuoso high.)

To create the atmosphere of celebrating the positive body image, this song has many remarkable musical elements to make the audiences happy by listening to the song. As we talked about in the previous paragraph, Trainor and Kadish have a bass line that goes through the whole piece, which make this piece very catchy and easy to follow. They also used hand clapping as snare drum beats in some sections. Combining with the female background singer, it creates a support and celebrating feeling in the song. This is also one of the reasons that lead this song to success.

### **Visual Performance**

In the music video of "*All about that bass*", there is four different scenes that alternate: group dancers, a skinny girl verses a chubby girl, Barbie and Ken, and a chubby male dancer. I found them really interested, because they all celebrated a thicker women's body, and link to the lyrics and the main idea.

First of all, there are always four dancers and Meghan Trainor dancing together through out the whole music video. Different from other pop music videos, the producer choose thicker girls as dancers in this video, and the dance moves are simple, groovy. Also, there is a lot of lower body moves to emphasize a female sexual symbol – the butt. It also follows the lyrics, when it talks about the butt, the dancers either touch

or point to their lower body; when it talks about upper body, it has the same motion to emphasize the upper body (usually boobies.) It makes me think of the women's nature responsibility. According to Richard Leppert, lower body dance moves connect to human's original desire, which again, states the point that women's bodies are not supposed to be skinny.<sup>3</sup> The purpose is for breeding later generation. In addition, because of pursuing more costumers, singers and producers create a lot of complicated dance moves to make their performances cooler. In this video, it used 1950s dance style, which surprisingly works really well and fits the idea.



Second, I especially like the Barbie and Ken scene in the music video: Ken (Barbie's boyfriend) is sitting in front of dining table, and the girl who is behind him, who supposed to be a skinny Barbie, is Meghan who dresses like a Barbie. This is a message that states chubby girls can also have a beautiful romance and a handsome boyfriend. Furthermore, the only male dancer in this video is considered to be a big size guy. As people normally think, bigger guys move slowly; however,

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<sup>3</sup> Leppert, Richard D. "Music and the body: dance, power, submission." In *Sound Judgment: Selected Essays* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 205-212.

this male dancer's dance moves are amazingly fast, light, and full of passion. This also proves the anti stereotype of bigger size people.



Last, there is only one skinny girl in this video who plays an important role in delivering the message. The girl is in a small white suit with plastic wrapping all around her body. It is a metaphor. Nowadays, a lot of girls do plastic surgery or photo shop to create a beautiful body image that society admires. As the song described, *“I see the magazines working that Photoshop. We know that shit ain’t real.”* In addition, in the beginning of the video, this skinny girl acts arrogant and disrespectful; then the second time she shows up, she is watching a thicker girl shaking her butt; the last time she appears in the video, she tries to touch the thicker girl’s butt like she is jealous of it. Again, it hits the point that made in this song, *“Cause I got that boom boom that all the boy chase”,* and *“I’m bringing booty back. Go ahead and tell them skinny bitches.”*



### **Music Identity –**

**“All about that bass” reflects the ideal women body type in recent pop music phenomenon.**

It is a fact that Women’s bodies affect their career in all kinds of different workspaces even nowadays, especially in performing art area. A female singer’s success can be linked not only to her talent and her appearance, such as her face, body, and style. Sometimes, the appearance affects more than the talent.

A-mei is one of the best female singers in Taiwan and China. She started her career in 1996. She released 27 albums, 4 EPs, 18 songs for commercial and TV shows, and performed and produced 10 world tour concerts, and 2 musicals. She also won 7 Golden Melody Awards in Taiwan and got nominated for many times. She is the first Asian singer who to be interviewed by CNN, and the first Asian singer who is on the Time Magazine. Her achievements can be compared to Maria Carry, Céline Dion, or Madonna in Chinese popular music. All of these prove that A-mei is a great singer, musician, and artist; however, in late 2013 to 2014, she became a larger women due to the huge life pressure. The media used “fat”, “huge” to described her body, and said she looks like a “pig” or “transformer”, and she has “huge legs like elephants’.” After couple



days, media started to discuss how “unprofessional” she is as a singer because of her weight gain. They claimed that creating a beautiful image on stage for the audience is her duty. To respond to the media, A-mei said that “I am a singer, not a model” A lot of people agree with her, but according to the reports, she still lost some performance opportunities, commercials, and product endorsements.



(2012 A-mei)



(2014 A-mei)

A-mei’s example clearly shows how a women’s body affect a women’s career in the pop music world. Traditionally, people see woman who are skinny as a symbols of beauty. People are starting to change their view of the woman’s body’s. Helping to promote a healthy body through the awareness of women’s rights, articles, news and celebrities.

From 1960s, as women’s rights rose, female musician and artists started to realize how the media was consuming women’s body without knowing. According to Jacqueline Warwick’s article “He Hit Me, and I was”, lyrics from female pop songs

changed from captive to initiative.<sup>4</sup> Women started to sing for themselves rather than sing for males; women started to use “I” in lyrics rather than being an object; women started to sing their ideas rather than presenting a perfect good girl; and most importantly, women start to be themselves rather than be who media wants them to be. Avril Laving, Pink, and No Doubt are good examples, and of course, Meghan Trainor.<sup>5</sup>

In “*All about that bass*”, we can observe the changes of the value of a women’s body. Of course, this song is still using a women’s body as an object, but the point is that it brings the idea that women have the right to decide what they want to look like, and they have the right to be proud of themselves. “*If you got beauty beauty just raise ‘em up, ‘cause every inch of you is perfect from the bottom to the top*” from “*All about that bass*” has the same idea from “*I am beautiful no matter what they say...., I am beautiful in every single way*” from “*Beautiful*” by Christina Aguilera. They both encourage women to be proud of themselves. In another aspect that proves that people have started to accept different kinds of women’s bodies as a singer, for example, Meghan Trainor’s body shape and voice type. She isn’t a skinny girl either. All the famous female singers in 80s and 90s are extremely skinny. And they are all considered to be sopranos. In that period, people pursued pure and higher pitched female singers, for example, Maria Carey, Whitney Houston, and Britney Spears. For now, we can easily think of many examples of famous female singers who are not super skinny with lower range voices, such as Adele, Nichi Minaj, and Beyouce.

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<sup>4</sup> Warwick, Jacqueline, “*He Hit Me, and I was Glad*”: *Violence, Masochism, and Anger in Girl Group Music.*” In *She’s So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence and Class in 1960s Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010,) 89-108.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-108

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that our society will still celebrate thinness; however, this song shows that women in this generation know that they have the right to love their body no matter how it is, and society will start to accept this body as another kind of beauty: "I am all about that bass."

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