

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The act of reading is not a passive engagement with words on a page, it is an intricate dance between text and reader, a dynamic interplay that often extends far beyond the boundaries of the written word (Kershner, 2014). In the delicate dance between literature and societal norms, the act of reading emerges as a powerful catalyst for exploring, questioning, and deconstruction of existing constructions. Literature has the power to create narratives that penetrate society's thinking and reflect the complexity of the relationship between individuals and social structures.

Wellek & Warren (2014) argue that literature is the result of creative expression that gives rise to works of art. Literary works are the product of a writer's thinking and feelings in creating a work. Writers can use narrative and dialogue between characters to describe debates or conversations about issues in literary works, especially in societal norms. One of the types of literature is novel. Novel reflects the picture of real characters, characters that depart from social reality and can convey dialogues and conversation that can stir and move the hearts of the readers (Fithratullah, 2021). Thus, a literary work is able to include the inspiration and feelings felt by the author.

One concept that is constantly faced in society is the definition of beauty. Beauty standards that are often promoted, such as white skin, long hair, slim bodies, and symmetrical faces, are generally considered to be the result of social construction

dominated by male thinking (Besman, 2018). Women are often depicted as objects of beauty that are owned and controlled by men. Apart from that, society also often sets certain standards that determine what is considered beautiful and what is not. As a concept constructed by society, beauty standards directly influence women's experiences, and the understanding of feminism touches on women's rights to be free from expectations and norms that provide a narrow understanding of beauty (Ioannou, 2018). These standards can vary greatly from one culture to another, creating norms that can limit perceptions of beauty and disadvantage individuals who do not meet these standards. This creates enormous pressure on women to conform to these norms in order to be socially accepted or even respected.

Feminism is a social and political movement that fights for equality and social justice for women (Apristia, 2019). Behind every step in the feminist struggle there are fundamental beliefs or principles that guide feminists in fighting for their goals, which are called "feminist values". These values include women's empowerment and rejection of narrow beauty standards. These feminist values provide the foundation for the feminist movement to continue to develop and achieve its goals.

One area in which feminism specifically interacts with feminist values is in challenging the narrow and unrealistic standards of beauty applied primarily to women. Feminism highlights how society's standards of beauty are often influenced by masculine views of physical attractiveness (Yusuf & Susilo, 2020). In this context, feminism challenges the idea that a woman's value lies solely in her appearance, and promotes the idea that true beauty lies in diversity, strength, and individual personality, not in meeting expectations set by narrow and unrealistic

norms. Therefore, the relationship between feminism, feminist values, and resistance to harmful beauty standards highlights feminist efforts to fight for equality and liberation for all individuals, regardless of physical appearance.

Historically, women have been subjected to unrealistic and often oppressive beauty ideals, and perpetuated by social norms that reinforce narrow definitions of female attractiveness (Asri, 2018). Feminism seeks to deconstruct and challenge these standards, and advocates for a more inclusive and diverse understanding of beauty. In this case, feminism supports diversity and independence in expressing oneself without fear or pressure from the norms imposed by society.

The novel *Dumplin* by Julie Murphy is a literary work that describes feminist values regarding the perception of female beauty faced by the main character. In this novel, these themes are explored through the main character's struggle to gain self-confidence and confront social stereotypes involving physical appearance. The issue of feminism in *Dumplin* arises when Willowdean decides to take part in a beauty pageant which is usually entered by women with a body shape that conforms to social standards even though she knows that her body is not appropriate. In this context, the beauty pageants can be seen as a space for women to express themselves. However, on the other side the beauty pageants can be seen as a competition that promotes narrow standards of beauty.

In this case, Willowdean's actions appear to be at odds with feminist values that challenge the detrimental norms and expectations imposed by society regarding beauty and body shape. This can create the inconsistency of the concept of feminism

and it is not in accordance with feminist value which should oppose narrow standard of beauty. There is conflict and tension between the feminist messages emphasized in the narrative and the actions or decisions of certain characters.

The purpose of this analysis is to critically examine the novel "*Dumplin*" by Julie Murphy through the lenses of deconstruction and post-structuralist approach. By employing these theoretical frameworks, this research aims to unravel the complexities and ambiguities surrounding feminist issues depicted within the novel. Deconstruction offers an appropriate analytical framework for uncovering contradictions and tensions in texts, as well as for highlighting how language and narrative structures are used to reinforce or undermine the social and power constructions underlying beauty norms.

Deconstruction, pioneered by Jacques Derrida, emphasizes the fluidity and instability of meanings inherent in texts, suggesting that interpretations are always open to multiple and often contradictory readings. By employing deconstruction as a lens, this study seeks to unravel and analyze the ambiguities and inconsistencies within the novel's representation of feminism, potentially revealing its subversion of traditional definitions and expectations.

This research aims to empower and validate diverse experiences and identities by critically analyzing the novel "*Dumplin*" through deconstruction and post-structuralist approaches. It highlights how dominant narratives about beauty and femininity are constructed and perpetuated, and explores methods to deconstruct and subvert these norms. By centering the voices of marginalized individuals, the

research fosters self-acceptance and empowerment, promoting inclusivity and challenging societal pressures to conform to narrow standards of beauty and gender roles.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulates research questions that serve as the focal points to be addressed throughout this research:

How is the inconsistency of feminist values depicted in the *Dumplin* novel?

1.3 Research Objectives

In light of the research question provided earlier, the researcher also identified the research objectives as the goal of this research. The research objective is to reveal the inconsistencies and analyze the ambiguities within the novel's representation of feminism.

1.4 Use of Study

This study is important for two respective reasons. The "uses of study" typically refer to the practical and theoretical contributions or applications of the research being conducted. These uses help demonstrate the significance and relevance of the study. Here the writer has two uses of study:

1.4.1 Theoretical Use

In the theoretical framework used in this thesis, the theory of Deconstruction by Jacques Derrida is a tool for examining the author's consistency in upholding feminist values in the novel *Dumplin*. This theory facilitates text analysis that reveals layers of meaning embedded in language and narrative structure. Allows

identification of fundamental contradictions and ambiguities. This theory contributes to the dynamism of feminist perspectives in literature, encouraging critical examination of the intricacies involved in defending or challenging feminist principles in narrative.

1.4.2 Practical Use

Practical implications derived from this research can be applied by future researchers to conduct deeper analysis concerning feminism values with the same theory. Additionally, this analysis provides perceptions and suggestions for encouraging constructive social change.

1.5 Scope of Study

To limit the discussion, the writer decided to use the *Dumplin* novel by Julie Murphy to answer previously formulated research questions, namely about feminism's value. Focus on investigating or deconstructively reading *Dumplin's* novel by Julie Murphy. The study will look at how feminism's value is deconstructed or consistent in the story. To conduct the analysis, the researcher employed Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, classified as a poststructuralist approach.