



DECONSTRUCTION ANALYSIS ON FEMINIST VALUES DEPICTED IN *DUMPLIN* NOVEL BY JULIE MURPHY

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Abstract

The novel "Dumplin" by Julie Murphy explores the complexities and inconsistencies within the novel's representation of feminism. This research aims to analyze the inconsistencies and ambiguities contained in the narrative of the novel *Dumplin* by Julie Murphy using deconstruction theory by Jacques Derrida. The researcher used the descriptive-qualitative method in this study. Meanwhile, the data was taken from the novel *Dumplin* by Julie Murphy in the form of narrative, dialogue and sentences that describe inconsistencies and ambiguity about feminist values. The researcher conclude that the 3 categories of binary opposition contained in the novel *Dumplin* by Julie Murphy do not fully uphold feminist values. Even though this novel fight for feminist values, but the characters' actions or thoughts conflict with ideal feminist values. Thus, inconsistency is seen not as a failure but as a complexity of the reality of women's experiences in fighting for equality, because feminism is a movement that continues to develop depending on the context and individual experiences.

Keywords: deconstruction, feminism, inconsistency, values

INTRODUCTION

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 some fundamental beliefs or principles 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.

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,

in other side the beauty pageants can be seen as a competition that promote narrow standard of beauty.

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.

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

METHOD

This research applies a descriptive qualitative and utilizes the theory deconstruction method by Jacques Derrida. Descriptive qualitative methods are used to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, with a focus on detailed descriptions and contextual analysis. Qualitative descriptive is a method that the author provides for each explanation, fact, and survey to analyze the problems under consideration using data in the form of words (Farras & Nurmaily, 2020). Meanwhile, Derrida's deconstruction of theory is used as a critical analysis tool to detail concepts, reveal contradictions, and deconstruct the underlying theoretical structure. Data were obtained from relevant data sources to answer the research questions (Efrilia & Setiawan, 2020). As this study was a descriptive qualitative method, the data was mainly from texts, including narratives and dialogues (Kardiansyah, 2016). In this paper, the researcher uses the novel "Dumplin" by Julie Murphy as a data source with its material objects focused on the deconstruction of the feminist values contained therein. While the data are narratives and dialogues from the novel "Dumplin".

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the following discussion, the researcher explains and explores how the characters in the novel Dumplin show patterns of behavior and thinking that reflect the inconsistency of feminist values. The researcher identified critical moments in the narrative where contradictions emerged clearly, both in actions, conversations, and the internalization of feminist values. By using Derrida's theory of deconstruction, this analysis uncovers how narrative is not only a mirror for characters' internal conflicts, but also a tool for exploring the complexity and instability of meaning behind debated feminist concepts.

Binary Opposition

The table below is the binary opposition data found in the Dumplin novel. This binary opposition is divided into three categories with their respective binary opposition pairs, namely, appearance, social environment, and culture. These data provide an initial representation of how these topics are presented in the novel.

Table 3.1 Data of Binary Opposition

Category	Opposition 1	Opposition 2
Appearance	Heterogeneity on Female Body	Homogeneity on Female Body

Social Environment	Against Beauty Standards	Promote Beauty Standards
Culture	Social Construction	Individual Choice

"I'm not an ordinary girl. I'm big. I'm fat. I'm curvy. And I'm beautiful" (Murphy, 2015, p.5). Willowdean begins by stating that she is not an "ordinary girl". This shows that she is aware of traditional beauty standards that are usually associated with elegance, thinness, and slimness. She boldly rejected these definitions of beauty and asserted her identity as a "big," "fat," and "curvy" girl. Although Willowdean differs from traditional beauty norms, she states that she is "beautiful". This shows that she has high self-confidence and self-acceptance. She doesn't let other people's standards of beauty define her. This quote is a powerful statement about the importance of celebrating the diversity of women's bodies. Willowdean challenges the idea that only thin, slim women can be beautiful. She emphasized that beauty comes in all shapes and sizes.

"It's like all women are cut from the same cookie cutter. They're all thin, beautiful, and perfect. I'm not like that, and I never will be" (Murphy, 2015, p.102). The "cookie cutter" metaphor shows how popular culture attempts to standardize female beauty. This ignores the natural diversity and unique beauty that every woman has and can make women feel self-conscious and insecure if they do not have an appearance that meets these standards. Willowdean's sense of not fitting this mold shows how rigid beauty standards can make women feel alienated and excluded. The "cookie cutter" metaphor also speaks to the pressure women face to conform to rigid beauty standards. Women are encouraged to change their appearance to look like other women. This pressure can make women feel uncomfortable with themselves and feel the need to change their appearance to be accepted.

"I'm tired of living in a world that always says I'm not good enough. I'm tired of trying to be someone else. I want to be myself, just as I am" (Murphy, 2015, p. 13). The quote shows Willowdean's determination to reject the beauty standards imposed by society. She wants to be accepted for who she is, without having to change herself to conform to unrealistic beauty ideals. She encourages others to stop trying to be someone else and start accepting themselves for who they are without being burdened by the pressure to meet unrealistic beauty standards. Willowdean emphasizes that the true value of beauty is not about perfect physical appearance or conforming to norms set by society, but about self-confidence, honesty and authenticity. By expressing her desire to live without having to constantly chase an unrealistic image, Willowdean builds space for positive self-acceptance and appreciation for diversity in appearance and personality. Through her determination, she inspires others to find strength in their own uniqueness and reject limiting norms.

Participant: "I've tried all kinds of diets and exercise to get the perfect body and trained on the catwalk for months for this moment."

Rosie: "Well done, girls! Remember, appearance is the main key to winning this contest. Make sure you look beautiful and charming on stage" (Murphy, 2015, p.67)

The dialogue above shows how Rosie and the contestants of the Miss Clover City beauty pageant are obsessed with appearance and narrow beauty standards. They focus on diet, exercise, and outward appearance to win contests. This shows how traditional views of beauty still dominate their minds, with an overly focused focus on physical appearance and a lack of emphasis on diversity and individual uniqueness.

Based on the binary opposition data table provided, it can be concluded that in the novel there is a complex conflict between various conflicting elements. In the Appearance category, there is an opposition between Heterogeneity in the Female Body and Homogeneity in the Female Body. Willowdean and other characters challenge the homogeneity of women's bodies by celebrating the diversity of body shapes and rejecting narrow standards of beauty. They face pressure to conform to norms imposed by society, which creates conflict between individual identity and social expectations.

Hierarchical Opposition

Below is a data table of hierarchical opposition found in the novel *Dumplin*. The table provides an initial overview of the more dominant conflicts in the story and of previous opposition, as well as showing concrete evidence that illustrates resistance to social norms and the struggle to maintain individual identity.

Table 4.2 Data Hierarchical Opposition

Dominant Table	Evidence
Heterogeneity on Female Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willowdean and Millie have a fat body - Willowdean has a tomboyish and casual dressing style
Against Beauty Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willowdean rejects traditional beauty standards by participating in beauty pageants - Dare to express yourself
Individual Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refuse to give in to social pressure - Bo loves Willowdean for who she is.

"Willowdean Dickson, a girl who wasn't afraid of taking up space. Not in a metaphorical way, either. She was a big girl with curves that could rival the winding roads of Texas" (Murphy, 2015, p. 3). That quotation provides a strong description of Willowdean Dickson's character in the novel *"Dumplin"*. Directly, the narrative depicts Willowdean as a figure who is not afraid to take up space, both physically and metaphorically. Her physical description as "a girl who is not afraid to take up space" highlights the strong self-confidence she possesses. When the narration mentions that Willowdean is "a big girl with curves that could rival the winding roads of Texas," this illustrates that her character has a body that is different from what might be considered "ideal" in society.

In the novel, Willowdean is also described as a tomboy who wears casual clothes. Willowdean's clothing choices, consisting of jeans, t-shirts and sneakers, reflect a more casual style. This shows that she has a strong preference for comfort and practicality in clothing, rather than following fashion trends or conforming to gender expectations that may exist in society. Her firm attitude towards her appearance illustrates that Willowdean is not afraid to express her true identity and refuses to be influenced by other people's expectations or views. It can be seen in the page of 76 of novel. "I'm not a girly girl, if you haven't noticed. I'm not into dresses and skirts and all that stuff. I like jeans and T-shirts and sneakers" (Murphy, 2015, p. 76).

Willowdean reaches a point where she decides to refuse to live up to other people's expectations and takes control of her own identity. Bravely, she chose to express herself and refused to be defined by narrow beauty norms. This is the background to her decision to challenge beauty standards by participating in a beauty pageant, which is a real act of courage and resistance to existing social pressures. The proof could be seen on pages 215 of the novel. "I can mess with the whole thing from the inside. Show everyone that pageants aren't about who's the prettiest or the thinnest. Maybe they can be about something else entirely" (Murphy, 2015, p. 215). The phrase "Mess with the whole thing from the inside" shows that Willowdean is a proactive and innovative character. He doesn't just

want to criticize, but also wants to take concrete steps to create positive change. She wants to show that beauty pageants can be a more inclusive and empowering platform for women. Willowdean wants to show that beauty pageants shouldn't just focus on physical appearance. She wants to dismantle the narrow standards of beauty promoted by these pageants because she sees beauty pageants as a means of promoting unrealistic and non-inclusive standards of beauty. She wants to challenge these standards and promote a broader definition of beauty. The quote also implies Willowdean's hope that the beauty pageant can focus on other things. Other values such as self-confidence, personality, achievement, or contribution to society may be considered.

"This isn't about you, Mom. This is about me. And I'm doing it my way" (Murphy, 2015, p. 240). From the quotation above, Willowdean emphasizes the importance of prioritizing personal needs, dreams and desires above all else. This reflects the process of the character's search for identity and maturity, in which Willowdean realizes that she has the autonomy and power to make decisions about her own life. This statement also indicates that he has taken important steps to separate himself from the influence or control of others, including his mother's influence, and to pursue his own path in accordance with his own values and identity. Ultimately, this quotation shows Willowdean's desire to be herself. She wants to pursue the things she loves and live her life on her own terms, without having to conform to other people's wishes.

"I love Willowdean for who she is. I don't care what other people say. For her, her uniqueness and beauty cannot be measured by narrow standards. I love her for who she really is, no matter what happens" (Murphy, 2015, p. 198). From the quotation above, the researcher sees that Bo is not influenced by what other people say about Willowdean, and her love does not depend on any changes in herself. He has a strong belief in his love and will not let negative comments affect his feelings. Bo realizes that Willowdean doesn't fit traditional beauty standards, but she doesn't consider it a flaw. Instead, he sees Willowdean's uniqueness as what makes her special and interesting. Bo loves Willowdean for her personality, her values, and all the things that make her who she is. He is not obsessed with her physical appearance, but is attracted to Willowdean's essence.

Overall, the hierarchical opposition data table shows that the categories of Heterogeneity on Female Body, Against Beauty Standards, and Individual Choice are dominant because the novel "Dumplin'" not only raises themes about women's empowerment and the struggle against narrow social standards, but also conveys the message that things considered negative by society or marginalized can be a source of strength and inspiration also can be turned into a tool to fight oppression and injustice.

The proof is heterogeneity on female body shows that the diversity of women's body shapes, which is often considered negative by society, can be a source of strength and pride for women. Willowdean learns to love themselves as they are, and they use the diversity of their bodies to challenge traditional beauty standards. Besides that, unrealistic traditional beauty standards are often considered negative because they can cause self-esteem and body image problems for women. However, in "Dumplin'", this struggle against standards becomes positive because it encourages women to dare to appear as they are and challenge limiting social norms. Also, this novel emphasizes the importance of individual choices in determining what is best for themselves. This can be seen in Bo who loves Willowdean for who she is even though he knows he will experience criticism and judgment from other people for loving a girl who does not conform to social standards. But that doesn't stop Bo's love for Willowdean.

Deconstruction

As seen in the table below, the "Dominant Table" column is the result of the hierarchical opposition table which is the focus of the analysis. The "Irony Fact" column contains facts that highlight aspects that are contradictory or ironic to the dominant idea of the hierarchical opposition or dominant table. Meanwhile, the "Result" column is the final result of the analysis used to answer this research question. By using a deconstruction approach, researcher can identify how some facts in the novel "Dumplin'" may conflict with the dominant themes raised in the narrative. This creates space to question the consistency of the message conveyed by the novel and highlights the complexities in the representation of feminism as well as the struggle against narrow social standards. Therefore, this deconstruction analysis provides more narrative formation and messages.

Table 4.3 Data of Deconstruction

Dominant Table	Ironic Fact	Result
Heterogeneity on Female Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rosie Dickson is obsessed with appearance and weight - Willowdean didn't win the beauty pageant 	Inconsistent
Against Beauty Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willowdean follows the contest rules and norms - Willowdean changes her appearance - Bo criticizes Willowdean's appearance 	Inconsistent
Individual Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willowdean invites her friends to take part in beauty pageants 	Inconsistent

"Willowdean, I've been worried about your weight lately. As a former beauty queen, I know how important appearance is in this world. You could look more attractive if you were a little thinner and took better care of yourself (Murphy, 2015, p. 189). It should be emphasized that Rosie is a former beauty queen whose views are influenced by beauty norms accepted by society, which makes her have to maintain her appearance and weight. Rosie feels that a physical appearance that conforms to traditional beauty norms will increase attractiveness and self-confidence. This made her encourage Willowdean to do the same by paying more attention to his appearance. This quote shows that Homogeneity on Female Body in a society that is still tied to traditional beauty standards because Rosie Dickson cannot fully accept and appreciate the diversity of women's body shapes. She is still attached to the idea that women must have a slim and ideal body to be considered attractive and it contrary to feminist values which emphasize acceptance of the diversity of women's bodies.

"You're disqualified. We can't let you finish the pageant. It wouldn't be fair (Murphy, 2015, p. 250). In the context of that quotation, Willowdean's rejection from beauty pageants highlights the incompatibility between the expectations imposed by beauty pageants and feminist values that emphasize acceptance of body diversity. The pageant maintains narrow beauty standards by disqualifying Willowdean, showing how social realities often conflict with feminist values. Because feminism aims to eliminate unrealistic expectations and narrow beauty norms that often pressure women to meet unrealistic standards (Desmawati, 2018). Therefore, the value of feminism actually supports the heterogeneity of women's bodies, which recognizes that every woman has a different body shape and each body shape must be respected and accepted without judgment based on conventional beauty standards.

"I knew I didn't fit the mold, but I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it anyway (Murphy, 2015, p. 235)". The "mold" in this quotation refers to traditional beauty standards often associated with beauty pageants. These standards typically promote thin women, with a certain physical appearance. Willowdean realizes that she doesn't fit those standards. She is different from most contestants who are generally slim but still want to participate. This could be because she wants to be accepted by her environment which promotes certain standards of beauty as she said on page 239 in the novel *Dumplin*. "I always felt like I was on the outside looking in (Murphy, 2015, p. 239)". This statement emphasizes the difference Willowdean perceives between herself and others. It suggests she feels distinct and separate from the perceived norm. It establishes her initial feelings of exclusion and sets up the potential for her to overcome them. By participating in the beauty pageant, she might be challenging this feeling of being on the outside and seeking acceptance on her own terms.

"I went shopping for a dress. I wanted something that would make me feel like a million bucks. I got my hair and makeup done professionally because I wanted to look my best for the pageant (Murphy, 2015, p. 224)". Based on that quotation, "make me feel like a million bucks" shows that Willowdean is looking for a dress that will make her feel confident and beautiful. She doesn't just focus on the physical appearance, but also on the feelings the dress evokes. This could be seen as a desire to conform to the standards of beauty promoted in pageants. Willowdean wants to feel confident, but she seeks that confidence from external things like dresses and makeup. This shows her remaining attachment to traditional beauty standards.

Based on the data table as a whole, it can be concluded that the development of the theme of feminism and resistance to narrow beauty standards in the novel "Dumplin'" through the deconstruction of beauty standards is not completely consistent. The table shows that there are dominant narratives about Heterogeneity on Female Body, Against Beauty Standards, and Individual Choices which are the main focus in forming messages and narratives in the novel "Dumplin'". However, the ironic facts presented show a discrepancy with the dominant narrative. This makes the message you want to convey become distorted and not completely consistent.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the representation of feminism in the novel "Dumplin'" is a complex subject and there is significant ambiguity which is revealed through a deconstruction approach. Researcher succeeded in identifying that feminist values in this novel are not always consistent throughout the narrative. There are moments where the protagonist may act or think in conflict with previously stated feminist values. An in-depth analysis of this ambiguity opens up space for broader reflection on the complexity of the feminist movement in real life. This reminds that feminism is not a static or homogeneous entity, but rather a discourse that continues to develop and is open to diverse interpretations.

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