THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE BEAUTY STANDARDS IN THE MOVIE "TALL GIRL": A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Representing females's beauty standards in the media significantly shapes people's views on self-esteem. This research is essential to understand how the media reveals a narrow definition of beauty standards. This research analyses the representation of female beauty standard of a main female character on a movie using critical discourse analysis by Sara Mills' theory. The movie "Tall Girl" served as the data source of this research. The data were analyzed with a qualitative approach through documentation, observation, and note taking and validated by expert judgment to determine the theory of feminism by revealing two research objectives: (1) how is the main female character views the beauty standards from the language used and (2) how is the main female character depicted from the language used in the movie. The findings and discussion of this research revealed that Jodi Kreyman, as the main character, transforms the position of an object of bullying to that of a subject who can accept her physical appearance. In addition, from the reader's position, the film allows the reader to empathize with Jodi's struggle and think more critically about the broader standards of female beauty. In conclusion, the movie challenges narrow beauty standards and demonstrates the importance of self- acceptance. Future research could analyze similar issues or the audience's perspectives on female beauty standards to create new insight.

Keywords: *Female beauty standards, Critical discourse analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Female beauty standards are society's reference point for judging a person's appearance. Every country has different standards that reflect the shifting values of society. Female beauty standards are a big issue in every country because each has different beauty standards (Nagara et al., 2022). This beauty standard is not permanent; it can change over time and be influenced by social, cultural, and technological development factors (Hidayah et al., 2024). In addition, media, such as advertisements, magazines, social media platforms and movies, shape beauty standards. The media often displays images of female who are considered ideal, such as fair skin, a sharp nose, a slim body, and others. Images of female considered ideal can influence their perceptions of themselves to conform to these images. Because of this beauty standard issue, female who do not fit the standards become unconfident, do extreme self-care, get discriminatory behaviour, and often become targets of bullying in verbal and physical forms (Kushwaha, 2024). Physical appearance is significant for most female. Female will undergo any treatment to enhance their beauty, even if it is painful, driven by the desire to be perceived as perfect by others. Special care is also

required for the face, body, hair, nails, and even eyelashes that are not very visible. This female beauty standard created by the thoughts of society also harms female who are not confident with their appearance to commit suicide. The way female see themselves is still affected and has not been able to escape the myth of femininity formed due to patriarchal culture, causing acts of discrimination to occur (Afifulloh and Wijayanti, 2022: Maknun et al., 2023).

This research used movies as data because movies can shape beauty standards through the visuals displayed. Through these visuals, audiences usually make the spectacle as a reference. The movie depicts the main female character with a perfect physical appearance. The perfect physical appearance causes many females to want this look by making efforts such as reducing food portions, having physical surgery to change their physical shape, and spending money on beauty products that can make a difference. Females have come to think that being beautiful is very beneficial to their lives to be socially accepted. However, in the movie "Tall Girl", the main female character tries to break the notion that beauty does not always have to conform to the ideal standard of beauty but simply by accepting ourselves. Tall Girls, which was released on September 13, 2019, was directed by Nzingha Stewart. Nzingha plays a significant role in realizing a story so the audience can imagine the film's meaning. The film has several dialogues that indirectly discuss beauty standards. This movie has a story that relates to female beauty standards because Jodi as the main female character has a height that exceeds the height of females in general. She also changes her appearance which shows that conforming to beauty standards can lead to social acceptance. In addition, this movie illustrates the impact of body shaming on females's self-image. The main female character struggles with her height and her attempts to control and discipline her body through makeup and clothes reflect the societal pressure to conform to beauty standards. It starts when a teenager named Jodi Kreyman, played by Ava Michelle, has a height that exceeds the average height of females in general, which is 187 cm. Jodi is the tallest female in her school. Because of this, Jodi often experiences verbal bullying by her friends.

This study aims to describe how the main female character is depicted from the language used in the movie and analyzed the main female character's view of beauty standards through the language used. By using the theory of critical analysis of discourse by Sara Mills to examine female's beauty standards in the movie "Tall Girl", this research examines female through concepts that reveal the position of the main female character into

a subject-object position and the reader's position. The focus of the feminist discourse perspective is to show how texts present female. Previous studies have conducted relevant topics using Sara Mills, but they still focus on depicting the female beauty standard from advertisement text as like beauty product. Thus, this research was worth conducting since it can add to current knowledge by showing how the main female character's narrative can influence self-image and society's view of beauty standards.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary subject in which linguists and sociologists collaboratively examine social phenomena inside discourse (Santosa, 2016). This term pertains to a specific area of applied linguistics linked to experts such Roger Fowler, Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak (Hart, 2010). Fairclough (2013) mention that there are many different types of discourse analysis. Certain forms are intricately linked to linguistics, intimately associating their assertions with grammatical truths and the functionality of various grammatical structures in distinct contexts of use. Others are also interested in relating language to politically, socially, or culturally controversial topics and in engaging in these issues in some way. These later forms of discourse analysis are commonly called "critical discourse analysis". (Eriyanto, 2011) Critical discourse analysis is an examination of language that extends traditional methods by also considering linguistic elements within specific settings, particularly those related to power dynamics (Agniaturrizki et al., 2024).

There are several theories in critical discourse analysis that can be used. There is theory about feminist stylistic by Sara Mills, social actors approach by van Leeuwen, dialectical relational approach by Norman Fairclough, socio cognitive by Teun van Djik, and discourse-historical approach Ruth Wodak (Asheva & Tasyarasita, 2022). From all of those theories, theories by Sara Mills and Norman Fairclough can be used to provides deeper analysis for this research about feminism, including how females are featured in the media. However, this research uses Sara Mills' theory because it has a more specific approach to gender analysis. Sara Mills presents a theory focusing on females's position as subjects and readers in critical discourse analysis (Eriyanto, 2011). Meanwhile, the theory by Norman Fairclough is more helpful in understanding the critical analysis of discourse as a whole. The complexity of Norman Fairlocugh's theory makes this research less practical because it only focuses on analyzing the representation of females in a film, not with a broader social

structure, namely with its three dimensions of analysis: text, discursive practices, and social practices (Fairclough, 2013). Therefore, Sara Mills' theory is more relevant for analyzing research topics on gender issues from a specific feminist perspective.

Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis

This research discussed the female beauty standard; it used the theory of Sara Mills' discourses analysis theoretical framework to analyze the data. Her perspective discourse is a feminist discourse which is better known as Feminist Stylistic (Siregar et al., 2020). Her attention focuses on discourses about injustice and misrepresentation of females. Sara Mills looks more at how the roles of actors are presented in the text and the roles of readers and writers are presented in the text (Asheva & Tasyarasita, 2022). In the end, the style of exposure and the roles that are placed and displayed in the text form a powerful party and become a minority party that is controlled. Gender means the visible differences between females and men based on social values and behaviors. Just as there are differences, there are also differences in the roles of each gender in society. From a feminist perspective, the prevailing conception of gender is understood as an ideological structure that divides people into two classes, men and females (Lazar, 2014). This research focuses on the discourse of feminism and how females are presented in texts. Theories by Sara Mills provide how the position of the subject-object and media in the movie identified the main female character. Females tend to be presented in texts as weaker than their male counterparts. This research mainly targets this injustice and poor portrayal of females.

The basic concept of Sara Mills' thought is to examine the position of actors in a text and image. Sara Mills developed an analysis to see how actors' positions are presented in the media. Two points are used in Sara Mills's theory to analyze the position of the subject-object and the position of the readers.

The Position of The Subject-Object in Discourse

Critical discourse analysis theory on subject-object position examines how identity, power, and gender relations are shaped through language. Sara Mills states that females are often seen as objects in the media, which refers to individuals or groups seen as passive objects often denigrated or cornered in a discourse (Mills, 2011). In this position, females are judged based on their physical form. The media usually views females based on their physical form and aesthetics as an object position (Fardouly et al., 2015). For example,

females considered by beauty standards will be seen as perfect without thinking about their character and abilities. In addition, subject position refers to individuals or groups seen as active subjects with power or control in a discourse. When viewed as a subject position, females are portrayed as active, have a voice, and can control how society views them (Hayah and Mustikawati, 2024). For example, suppose females are positioned in the subject position. In this case, females are portrayed as females who can shape their identity and influence the existing narrative.

The Position of The Reader in Discourse

The theory of critical analysis of discourse by Sara Mills also introduces the concept of reader position that highlights how readers interpret the representations displayed in a media. Sara Mills said that the meaning of media is not only understood by the creator but can also be understood by the reader himself (Anjarwati, 2008). The reader's position can influence one's view in understanding and assessing the representation of females in the media. Readers with a critical understanding may have a narrow view of beauty standards as a social norm that needs to be challenged (Syarifah et al., 2022). However, readers who do not have a critical understanding will consider this representation as something normal.

Table 1. Sara Mill's Analysis Framework

Subject-Object Position	Reader Position
How does the main female character views the beauty standards from the language use?	How is the main female character depicted from the language in the movie?

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method because it analyses the female beauty standards in the movie, which reflect social life. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research is presented in words, not numbers. By using the facts as they appear or are, descriptive methods describe the current state of the subject or object of research (Maknun et al., 2023). The data are collected by documentation from the 'Tall Girl ' movie, available on the Netflix platform. The choice of Netflix as a data source is due to its popularity and accessibility, making it a relevant and credible source for this research. This research applies a case study as the research strategy to collect the data. A case study is

selected because it enables a thorough examination of the topic in the context of actual life (Schoch, 2020).

This research focuses on film analysis. Therefore, this research does not involve any participants. The main object of this research is the main female character in the movie Tall Girl, who experiences problems with beauty standards. This research analyzes how the main female character is portrayed and how the dialogue in the film represents females's beauty standards. This research used two techniques for data collection. The two techniques used are documentation by note-taking and observation. These techniques can help the researcher understand female beauty standards in the movie. Note-taking is a strategy that captures the key points of the spoken text hear (Siegel, 2023). While Observation involves the investigator watching the subjects or research situation (Kumar, 2023). Several steps are taken to collect data: watching the movie through Netflix that is the research object, rewatching the movie while analyzing and observing the movie's dialogue about female beauty standards.

To analyze how the main female character is portrayed as a subject-object in the film's narrative, this research applies the theory of critical discourse analysis by Sara Mills. In addition, this research also analyzes how the reader's position is directed to understand females's beauty standards. This research aims to reveal the deeper meaning behind the main female character's struggle against society's view of beauty standards. It is raised as a case to be studied in depth to uncover the reality behind the phenomenon.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research objectives, this study describes the main female character views about the beauty standards from the language use. The following are the research results of the problem formulation.

The main female character in the movie Tall Girl, Jodi Kreyman, played by Ava Michelle, is a teenage girl who does not feel confident with her height, which is not the same as the average girl her age. Jodi's height often made her a target for teasing from her friends, leaving her feeling different and out of place according to prevailing beauty standards. She is the tallest female student in her school, 185 cm tall. However, as the movie progresses, Jodi embarks on a journey towards self-acceptance, learning to embrace her uniqueness and challenging societal beauty standards (Agatha and Ariyaningsih, 2024). This insecurity is

caused by society's view of females who have a physical appearance that does not match the general beauty standard, which is that females must have a small and slim body (Aparicio et al., 2019).

In this movie, Jodi is an object ridiculed and judged by her friends because she does not meet the standard of beauty. Through the language used by Jodi, she expresses her resentment towards her peers' views on beauty standards that refer to her height as a flaw. This position is seen in the scene where Jodi feels insecure about her height when she says, "You think your life is hard?", which shows that Jodi sees herself as an individual who is trapped in a view that harms females because of her physical appearance that is different from her female peers. These different physical appearances affect psychological well-being (Merino et al., 2024). Ridicule from her friends, such as the frequent taunt "How's the weather up there?" became a constant and unwelcome part of her daily experience. In dialogue like "I'm a high school junior wearing size 13 Nikes. Men's size 13 Nikes!" Jodi directly criticizes society's views, which make her feel alienated because of her tall body. These taunts affect how Jodi views herself regarding her height, making her uncomfortable with her physical shape. This discomfort continuously makes Jodi compare herself to a narrow standard of beauty. Self- comparison has a negative impact as it can affect the self's perception of their body image, leading to dissatisfaction and inadequacy (Simanjuntak & Harahap, 2022).

However, as the storyline of this movie develops, Jodi undergoes significant changes. At the beginning of the story, Jodi portrayed as a character who is insecure and shy and feels alienated by most of her friends at school. Finally, Jodi realized that one's self-worth is not judged by physical appearance. It can be seen when she said, "I am not going to apologize for being tall," that Jodi begins to make peace with her physical condition. From this storyline, Jodi's position as an object change to a subject position where Jodi controls how society views her. Jodi's change is seen in the scene when she begins to accept herself and says, "Being tall is actually defined me, I like me". From the psychological side, a more self-accepting person develops greater resilience to life changes and deepens one's desire to live (Allore and Levy, 2020).

Jodi is also portrayed as a talented piano player. Her father asked her why she had not played the piano in a long time, but her physical condition hinders her potential "It is just because when you are good at something, other people tend to want to watch you do it,

and I don't need to give people another reason to look at me". This movie proves that the pressure to meet the prevailing beauty standards can hinder females from pursuing their potential. In addition, it can be seen from a sentence uttered by someone who dislikes Jodi, Kimmy Stitcher. She said a sentence that indirectly makes Jodi not confident in her talent, "Taylor Swift? More like Taller Swift". Susie Orbach stated that the pressure on females to have perfect bodies is getting worse, which can interfere with their mental and physical well-being and limit their ability to pursue their potential (Post J, 2018). In addition, as the protagonist, Jodi is portrayed as a representation of females who struggle against narrow beauty standards amidst the demands of society. Jodi also teaches the audience that accepting oneself is the first step to finding happiness.

In addition, this study also analyzes females' beauty standards using critical discourse analysis by Sara Mills to reveal how the main female character depicted from the language use in the movie. The results of the research on the movie are as follows.

This movie tells the story of Jodi Kreyman, a teenager portrayed as a subject whom her friends bully because she is not considered to be by the standards of female beauty. However, as the story progresses, she turns into a confident female who can fight against narrow beauty standards because of the support of her family and close friends. From this story, the audience is directed to sympathize with Jodi's struggle through a point of view that focuses on her emotional experience.

The audience's perspective on this movie is directed to understand and sympathize with Jodi Kreyman's struggle through her story of being a victim of bullying against beauty standards. As in the beginning of the scene, when Jodi feels uncomfortable with her friend's treatment of her at school, she bends her body slightly to look shorter. From this scene, the audience is expected to empathize with Jodi, who feels insecure. She even liked a taller guy for the first time, but she was not confident and said, "He do not even look at me". However, the storyline develops when Jodi begins to accept herself by defining beauty standards from her perspective through a speech, she delivers to all her schoolmates at their school reunion party. The speech delivered by Jodi describes her journey from an inferior figure to a more confident figure in terms of her physical appearance and she was dating a shorter guy. From Jodi's change, readers are positioned to interpret what Jodi said, support Jodi's change, and apply the meaning to the readers' real lives.

Visually, the movie supports the reader's position by focusing on the differences between the main female character and other supporting characters more in line with the perceived perfect standard of beauty, such as Kimmy Stitcher, one of the cast characters who likes to bully Jodi. It can be seen that Jodi is put in a situation where Kimmy prank her and say, "You are the tall girl, you will never be the pretty girl". In addition, the reader's position is also focused on Jodi's interaction with the supporting character, Jack Dunkleman. He is a short guy who is interested in Jodi's character, it can be seen when Jack said "Look, I know I don't have everything on your perfect boyfriend checklist". Their relationship shows how Jack Dunkleman appropriately treats Jodi. This interaction between Jodi and Jack allows the audience to judge that not everyone hates the things most people have a problem with regarding beauty standards. So, even if someone does not think Jodi is perfect, Jodi is still perfect in someone else's eyes.

Based on Sara Mills' theory, Jodi has an objectified role because she is often bullied for her height by her friends. As the story begins, the main female character, Jodi Kreyman, is portrayed as a 16-year-old girl who is depressed because she is the height of a man and is considered not to fit the existing beauty standards, so she is often the object of negative comments by her schoolmates. Some of her friends' negative comments, such as "How's the weather up there?" create a sense of distrust for Jodi. In addition, negative comments such as "Besides, you really do not think a guy as hot as Stig would be into you, do you?" mean that no man will be interested in Jodi because of her height. All these negative comments made Jodi feel inferior and want to hide from public attention. Her responses, such as "I just want to be normal" and "No one will ever like me because I don't look like other girls", illustrate that she thinks beauty standards have cornered her physical appearance. However, as the story develops, Jodi realises that the views of those around her do not determine her value. It will be endless if Jodi listens to what others say about her. At the end of the story, Jodi turns into someone who accepts herself for who she is and starts to be confident in living her life. This is illustrated by Jodi's positive responses, such as "I am really tall and it is the thing that is haunted me my entire life. It is defined me. Keep calling me names, because I can take it", which shows her change from a victim of bullying to a female who can defined herself.

However, as the story progresses, Jodi becomes a subject as she begins to accept that her height exceeds that of the average female. This can be seen in her statement, "I'm not

going to apologize for being tall" She shows that she wants to fight against beauty standards that assume that tall females are bad. This change experienced by Jodi illustrates the shift from a passive to an active position. At the end of the story, she dares to reveal to all her friends that she has no problem living outside the beauty standards that many people refer to. She resists bullying and defies beauty standards and shows the courage to accept herself as she is.

From the reader's position, at the story's beginning, the audience feels empathetic when they see Jodi as a victim of bullying by her friends because her height does not match the ideal beauty standard, so Jodi feels insecure. However, at the end of the story, the audience is invited to feel Jodi's journey as she begins to accept that she does not have to live up to the beauty standards that most people refer to. This acceptance is seen when Jodi looks confident with her new style of dress at the school reunion "It is defined me. But I think it is time that I come up with a new definition. Being tall actually is what makes me, I like me. So go ahead and keep making fun of me. Keep asking me 'How is the weather up there?' I can take it, because the weather up here it is pretty great." She feels relieved that she doesn't have to keep hiding because of her height.

Although Jodi can accept herself in the end, Jodi's struggle towards self-acceptance is still based on internal changes and recognition from those closest to her. This indirectly reinforces the view that one needs to prove one's worth to be accepted in one's social environment instead of encouraging unconditional acceptance (Park et al., 2006). In addition, Jodi's portrayal of a female with fair skin colour, slim body, and symmetrical face proves that although the film challenges some aspects of beauty standards, she is still trapped within the existing representations of beauty. Therefore, the film indirectly reinforces the power structure that prioritizes physical features despite claiming to transcend conventional beauty standards.

CONCLUSION

The findings conclude that at first, Jodi is portrayed as an object of the views of those around her, and her language shows her insecurity due to the burden of fulfilling the prevailing beauty standards. But in the end, Jodi is determined to change into a more confident figure in her physical appearance. The reader's position in this movie is directed to think critically about narrow beauty standards and support the diversity of broad beauty standards. For further research, other researchers are expected to be able to discuss more

deeply the issue of female beauty standards towards other characters in the film or analyze different films related to female beauty standards to compare how beauty standards are depicted. In addition, research with a quantitative approach can be conducted to measure the impact of movies on audience perceptions of female beauty standards. Thus, this study and further research can provide greater insight and new views on how the media can influence people's views on females' beauty standards.

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