

**Portraying Maternal Love Diversity of Selected Characters in *Dumplin'* Novel by Julie Murphy****Nia Alfani¹, Ruisah,²**^{1,2} Sastra Inggris, Universitas Pamulang¹nalfani295@gmail.com**Article Info***Article History:*

Received

12 October 2022

Approved

12 November 2022

Published

12 December 2022

Abstract

This study aims to analyze diverse type of maternal love possessed by selected female characters in *Dumplin'*, a novel by Julie Murphy. *Dumplin'* is chosen as object of this study which firstly published in 2015 about a sixteen years old girl who lives with her mother, but she is raised by her aunt. Receiving conditional love from her biological mother causes her possessing obsessive attributes. Besides, she also receives unconditional love from her aunt which causes her experiencing conditional depression. This study uses qualitative approach by identifying the issue and presenting the results in form of text. Using Erich Fromm's (1956) theory about love, distinct version of maternal love is portrayed and observed through main character's point of view. The result of this study shows that there are distinctive type of maternal love in form of conditional love of biological mother and unconditional love of non-biological mother which affect main character's psychology.

Keywords: Motherly love, unconditional love, mother, non-biological mother

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Love is an essential feeling which brings happiness in every human being. People produce and enjoy the product of happiness related with love such as writing romantic story, reading happy-ending novel, and listening to love song. Unlike love between partners, many authors are inclined to set this theme as supporting theme in developing the problem of the main theme. This becomes interesting to be analysed as concept of parental love needs to be transferred for those who does not aware of how this love possesses supreme influences both for parent themselves and the children.

Parental love is divided into two separated kinds of love which are motherly love and fatherly love. This is distinguished regards to each characteristic of how love is delivered. Nowadays, there are single mothers who have to be father figure as the leader in a family and begin to neglect their duty as a mother of children. The mother's unconditional love which children deserve to receive it, sometimes shifts to father's conditional love. This shift of love may exist due to certain causes which definitely give various effects both for the mother and the children. This issue can commonly be found in literary works such as novel, short story and poetry as it is known that literature is a tool to portray how life is in certain place and period.

One novel that focusses on this issue is *Dumplin'*, young adult novel by Julie Murphy which was first published in 2015. This novel tells about a fat girl named Willowdean Dickson who lives

with her biological mother, Rosie Dickson, yet she was raised by her aunt, Lucy Dickson. Instead of receiving unconditional love from her biological mother, Willowdean senses the sweetness of life because of Lucy who always loves her just the way she is. Through *Dumplin'*, the writer using the main character's point of view would like to identify maternal love diversity of selected characters – Rosie Dickson and Lucy Dickson – and its causality towards Willowdean Dickson as the main character.

Love is a beautiful art that need to be learned and be practiced to acquire its beauty. According to Fromm (1956, p. 46) there are five types of love consists of brotherly love, motherly love, erotic love, love of self, and Love of God regarding to the object which is loved. Motherly love is known as the love of a mother towards her children. Unlike love of a father which is conditional affirmation, “[m]otherly love . . . is unconditional affirmation of the child's life and his needs” (Fromm, p. 49). This means that a mother would always love her children and fulfil her children's needs unconditionally without considering certain excuses. Motherly love is unequal love as the mother is the transmitter while the child is the receiver. If it exists, it exists and poisonous, but if it does not exist, there is no single action that could create it except the mother herself.

Ideal children can be achieved by the balance between father's ideal love and mother's ideal love as these loves play significant roles in children's character development. Meanwhile, Fromm (1956, p. 41) notes that his ideal type of motherly and fatherly love lies on the principle of mother and father. He adds that not every mother and every father would be as his ideal type who presents certain type of love. This can be defined that there is possible incompatibility for those mother and father out of Fromm's ideal type. For instance in common cases, mother is discovered murdering her own children in the practice of abortion. In this case, there is no unconditional love existing within mother as biological mother. Another instance of this unusual custom is the unconditional love of non-biological mother. Non-biological mother here is classified as those who are able to replace the figure of mother in loving the children unconditionally. They may come from the members of family or –in rare case– come from stranger. These cases show that there is diverse form of maternal love: conditional love of biological mother and unconditional love of biological mother.

There is cause and effect of this diversity which influences and are influenced by individual psychology. The first term used by Fromm for this disturbance is called father-centred attachment. The existence of this disturbance lies on the parents' character in which mother possess masculine quality as domineering father. Therefore, children grow as independent and obedient person since he was taught about the significance of order, law and authority. Meanwhile, he do not experience how it feels like being loved unconditionally. In further cases, this father-centred attachment may cause serious disorder related with neurosis such as obsessional neurosis (Fromm, 1956, p. 45).

The second neurotic development caused by the imbalance between father's and mother's love is mother-centred attachment. If the mother has masculine character whilst the father presents unconditional love, this would not cause any neurotic development. This because children still receive both type of love even though it switched. However, mother-centred attachment exists when mother who present unconditional love is paired with ignorant father. As the result, children are not provided with fatherly qualities such as discipline, obedience, and independence. As it could be worst, this mother-centeredness (Fromm, 1956, p. 46) may cause serious problems towards children's psychological development such as “hysteria, alcoholism, inability to assert oneself and to cope with life realistically, and depressions”.

METHOD

In conducting this thesis, the writer used qualitative approach. The writer decided to use this approach as it requires deep understanding in analyzing process which the data is served in texts and essays. This approach does not result ordinal values and the result may vary between researchers which is also influenced by the theory used and writer's understanding. The writer in this study used two kind of data sources which are primary data and secondary data. Primary data is taken from a novel entitled *Dumplin'* by Julie Murphy. It was first published on 2015 and it won prices from YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults 2016, Bank Street CBC Best Children's Book of the Year 2016, Amelia Bloomer List 2016 and six other awards and honours. Whilst, secondary data are taken from books, theses and journal articles.

There are several steps that were used by the writer in collecting data. Firstly, the writer read the novel multiple times to deeply understand the novel. While understanding the storyline of the novel, the writer identified the possible issues that can be analyzed. After defining the main issue, the

writer collected and compiled the data related with the chosen issue by marking and highlighting the citations. This assists writer in arranging the analysis in the main chapter. After the data were collected, writer analyzed the data by using expert's theory. Before the data were analyzed, the writer re-read and examined the theory that would be used in this study. The writer also collected several points of the theory which support the issue in analyzing process. Afterwards, the collected data were analyzed and matched with the expert's theory which then served in the form of texts and essays.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Maternal Love Diversity Portrayed in *Dumplin'*

Rosie's Conditional Love

Love of a father is different from mother. In *Dumplin'*, Rosie, a single mother who lived with her sister and her daughter, places obedience in form of rules and order to be followed. In fact, she has the character to control, to create rules, and to discipline her family members. As she was the Miss Teen Blue Bonnet 1997 in Clover City, Rosie always to ask her daughter to do dieting. "The last few days of school mark the start of pageant prep season, which means my mom is on a diet. And when my mom is on a diet, so is everyone else" (Murphy, 2015, p. 14). This obedience quality is planted within Will's personality. Rosie is succeed in establishing authority which influences Will to grow as obedient person.

In order to fulfil his expectation, a father sometimes compares his children with others to increase sense of competence. In fact, this character also exists in Rosie's personality. The day everyone giving their performance, Rosie complements Hannah, instead of Will's performance. "When the applause fades, my mom says, 'Hannah, that was lovely.' And she says it in a way that says, *Now, that is how you do it, Dumplin'*" (Murphy, 2015, p. 184). Rosie's demanding character wants Will to be more prepared in the next performance assessment.

Lucy's Unconditional Love

Lucy Dickson, the sister of Rosie and the aunt of Will who had passed away, is the character who presents unconditional love of a mother. In fact, Will as the main character admits to her mom that "Lucy was more a mother to me than you'll ever be" (Murphy, 2015, p. 97). Lucy replaces and covers Rosie's roles as biological mother. Will experiences being protected, being loved, being respected, and being understood as a lovable daughter by Lucy. Unfortunately, unconditional love of her aunt has stopped since the death of Lucy.

Lucy is a kind-hearted person who understands and loves Will unconditionally. This refers to the event when Will has to go on a diet since her very young age. "I'd hear the two of them downstairs, arguing back and forth about [dieting] long after I should have been asleep. 'She is a child,' Lucy would say. 'I want her to be healthy,' my mom would retort (Murphy, 2015, p. 68)." This passage portrays that Lucy understands Will that dieting is not easy—specifically for a pretty young girl. This action creates a feeling that Will has someone who defends her and loves her without asking her to do dieting.

The Causality of Maternal Love Diversity towards Main Character's Psychology

Causes of Maternal Love Diversity

Fromm emphasises that not every mother would be same as his ideal type of mother. The action taken by Rosie is one of this dysfunctional role. The reason why Rosie presents her conditional love instead of Fromm's motherly love lies on her masculine character which dominates her feminine qualities. She is known as the head of pageant committee who has controlling and leading power. Will is amazed with her mother masculine character who own the stage of pageant. "Here, in her element, she's not my mother. Here, she is Rosie Dickson, Clover City's Miss Teen Blue Bonnet 1997. Here, she is royalty. Y'all hail the queen" (Murphy, 2015, p. 115).

Another reason this dysfunctional role happens is conditional matter. Being a single mother forces Rosie to replace the role of father. Replacing the roles of father, Rosie has to introduce her daughter to the world of thought, the law and order, the discipline, and the outer world. This is shown when Rosie still fits into her dress which she wore in Miss Teen Blue Bonnet 1997. On the other hand, she has to gain money to live their life. She has to spend her time more on her job causing her pays less attention to Will—her growing daughter. Her masculine side strengthens as she needs to face the bitterness of life. Living as single and working mother, she shows her care and take the responsibility for raising Will by herself without a husband. This conditional matter causes Rosie to possess more masculine side and to deliver fatherly love instead of mother unconditional love.

Similar with Rosie Dickson, the causes why Lucy presents unconditional love is also due to her feminine characters and conditional matter. Possessing more feminine character, Lucy has the nurturing and loving sense for people surround her. Will acknowledges this as she tries to visit a place that Lucy used to visit. Lucy is known by people in Hideaway as lovable person. “Without a moment of hesitation, Lee reaches for my hand. ‘I am so sorry,’ she tells me. ‘Lucy was a real gem. She had a kind, open heart. We were so sad to see her go’” (Murphy, 2015, p. 150).

Another reason why Lucy presents more motherly love places in the conditional matter. In fact, her presence makes Will value her more than Rosie. “When I was little and she had meetings or rehearsals to attend, I usually stayed home with Lucy or went over to El’s. (Murphy, 2015, p. 110)” Lucy has more time to raise and look after Will when her sister needs to leave her daughter for work. It is no wonder; if Will has more memorable time with Lucy, if Will has loved Lucy more than loves her mother; and if Will needs Lucy more than she needs her mother. Lucy fills the gap between Will and her biological mother because she has more time to spend with. Being supported with her maternal characters causes Lucy to play significant roles in Will’s life by presenting unconditional love of mother.

Psychological Effects of Maternal Love Diversity towards Willowdean

There are two psychological effects that are experienced by the main character: father-centred attachment and mother-centred attachment. The conditional love presented by Rosie towards Willowdean causes her having obsessional neurosis as she lives under father-centred attachment. Will becomes someone who possesses obsessive attitude.

The positive side of her obsession encourages Will to enter the pageant as she finds the registration form of beauty pageant with the name of Lucy in her drawer. “I’m not doing this to be some kind of Joan of Fat Girls or whatever. I’m doing this for Lucy. And for me” (Murphy, 2015, p. 111). With her overweight body for a beauty pageant participant, Will riskily registers the pageant her mother conducted without Rosie’s permission. The negative side of her obsession registering the pageant exists in the fact Will is obsessed to resist her mother which causes serious arguments between mother and daughter as Rosie says, “‘This isn’t some joke.’ . . . ‘Is this some kind of ploy for attention? Are you trying to get back at me for something?’” (Murphy, 2015, p. 112).

Rosie’s conditional love helps Will to build responsible character. “The half truth is that I feel responsible for the three of them and I thought maybe we could use some pointers for the pageant. I’m not trying to be a ringleader or anything. . .” (Murphy, 2015, p. 145). Will does understand that she creates this problem and she is aware that it is her responsibility after dragging her friends into the pageant. She attempts to help her friends by preparing and practicing together. She does not want her friend to be embarrassed on the stage. As the result, one of her friends wins the second runner-up.

As Lucy is the one who presents unconditional love, Will places her mother-centeredness on Lucy. This attachment becomes serious problem as Lucy passes away. Will experiences situational depression due to the death of her beloved aunt. Situational depression is the type of depression which majorly caused by the loss of significant person whom one’s loved, whom one’s need in one’s life. Will becomes a girl who is too emotional towards something that does not come up with her idea or her expectation. “I know I should be over Lucy being gone. It’s been six months now. . . She’s gone. And we don’t even have any picture of her” (Murphy, 2015, p. 21). Will hardly accepts the fact that Lucy had passed away. She is aware that her beloved aunt who always love her no matter what has no longer presented the love she needs.

Mother-centred attachment causes the children grow as dependent person who always thirsts of motherly love. Unconditional love of Lucy makes Will become individual who is too attached to the existence of Lucy. Even when Lucy is no longer with her, Lucy still becomes number one person who comes up on Will’s mind whenever, wherever and however condition she faces. “I’ve been real lost without her. Like, she was this compass I didn’t even know I had” (Murphy, 2015, p. 150). She convinces herself that Lucy is compass leading her to which one is the right path to walk through; that Lucy is the only place to go back after passing a long journey; and that Lucy is the goals and the guidance.

In Dumplin’, Will as the main character indeed receives both fatherly love and motherly love presented through Rosie’s conditional love and Lucy’s unconditional love. Will exactly has the principles derived from fatherly quality such as being responsible and having leadership skills. By taking her friends to learn and practice for pageant, she shows her quality on taking responsibility for the problems she has caused. She even thinks the most for her friends like a leader. On the other side,

she also receives motherly quality from Lucy. Through motherly quality, she grows as soft-hearted girl which leads her to be an emotional person. Her sense of nurturing is also found through her protective action towards priceless things and stuffs such as friends and Lucy's stuffs. In the story, however, Will is in the shift condition as her closest and beloved person passes away. All she needs is time to adjust herself with new condition lives with father-centred attachment.

CONCLUSION

In *Dumplin'*, love diversity is differed into conditional love of biological mother and unconditional love of non-biological mother. Biological mother conditional love is portrayed by the character of Rosie Dickson. The particular reasons for this unusual trait lies on Rosie's masculine qualities. Her conditional love creates neurotic development which Fromm says as father-centred attachment. Conversely, Will as the main character, receives unconditional love from her beloved aunt, Lucy Dickson. Even though Lucy does not have children, her feminine character influences her personality in loving others unconditionally. Nevertheless, her love also creates neurotic development known as mother-centred attachment. The writer would like to add suggestion to the readers who are interested in conducting research on similar issues related with the theory used. By reading recent theory about maternal love, it may help other researchers in finding new information related with condition in recent years. This paper indeed highlights the loves which are out of Fromm's ideal type of parental love (mother's unconditional love and father's conditional love). Without devaluing the principle of motherly and fatherly love, the writer tries to uncover the diversity by using those principle.

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