

Exploring the Beauty Myth in Kiera Cass's Novel 'The Selection' (2012)

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Abstract

This study aims to dismantle beauty myth in the novel The Selection (2012) by Kiera Cass. In the novel, Kiera Cass depicts a female character who always faces beauty standards. In analyzing the issue, the writer applies the concept of feminism from Naomi Wolf in her book Beauty Myth (2002) by using a qualitative method that focuses on the concept and impact of beauty myth as evidenced through a collection of narratives in the novel. The results found in this study are female characters only show four of the six beauty myth concepts described, such as work, culture, hunger, and violence, and the most dominant concept is culture. In addition, the writer also found the impact of beauty myths referring to restrictions on social freedom, causing discomfort, creating competitive conflicts, and losing a lot of time.

Keywords: *Beauty Myth, Beauty Standards, Culture, Feminism.*

A. Introduction

The beauty myth is a belief that dictated women to pay more attention to their beauty. Almost all women agree with the existence of beauty myths, even though it causes discomfort. It is proven that it can affect women. Therefore, most of women will feel threatened and then put forward their obsession to compete with ideal criteria without thinking about the impact. "As woman is an object, it is obvious that how she is adorned and dressed affects her intrinsic value" (Beauvoir, 1949, p.653). It states that to be beautiful, women will involve beauticians who can help change them according to beauty standards and this proves that women believe in beauty myths.

Beauty myth can also be experience by American sosialite is Jocelyn Wildenstein. Jocelyn Wildenstein, is an America socialite who had attracted public attention because of her obsession with plastic surgery. Reported by the site people.com (Heigl, 2022, para.1), "there is her face, which has undergone so many plastic surgeries that it's taken on a kind of feline quality, leading Wildenstein to be derided "Catwoman" in certain circles." Jocelyn is a woman who is obsessed with

beauty because she started with jealousy over infidelity her husband is with a model and is not even worried about the impact of cosmetic surgery. The bad impacts experienced by this socialite apart from being addicted to cosmetic surgery is getting a failed operation that changes her face for the worse and experiencing poverty because the operation has to be expensive and not balanced with income. Beauty myths are influenced by the assumption that beautiful women will always be championed by men.

Beauty myths are also featured in media printed among the literature written in the form of a young adult fiction novel entitled *The Selection* by Kiera Cass, which describes the issue of beauty myths. The Selection tells the story of 35 beautiful girls who compete with each other to become the wife of a young, rich and handsome prince named Maxon by taking advantage of his beauty. In this novel, some quotations describe beauty myths. This novel won the 2017 Young Hoosier Book Award (Middle Class). In addition, Publishers Weekly, The School Library Journal, MTV, The AV Club, and Booklist all gave positive reviews for *The Selection*. Therefore, the writer is interested in raising the issue of beauty myths in this novel, where female characters depict beauty myths and can also help readers about portray beauty myths and their impact.

Kiera Cass is an Author from America who writes young adult fiction. She grew up in South Carolina and went to Radford University, where she received his Bachelor of Arts (BA) in history. This also makes his books full of history, which is fun to listen to. *The Selection* is a New York Times bestselling book that has been an enormous success, selling millions of copies throughout the United States, and has led him to become the number one New York Time Best Seller author. In her biographical information. Still, She has received the young readers choice award, the louisiana teen readers choice and iowa high school book award, and the colorado blue spruce award.

B. Method

In this analysis, the writer used a qualitative approach because the object of study is a novel. The data are in the form of dialogue quotations delivered by the characters in the novel. It means that the study data does not contain measurement data in the form of numbers or measurements of variables. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use qualitative research to reveal meaning in the form of a description. "A qualitative research is generally characterized by an inductive approach to knowledge building that aims to produce meaning" (Leavy, 2017, p.9). The statement indicates that the data in the form of dialogue quotation taken from the object of study, namely a novel, can use qualitative research as an approach to the study of this literary study. The data collection process was obtained through a novel entitled *The Selection* by Kiera Cass, published in 2012, to find issues according to the study title, namely the representation of beauty myth using the theory of Naomi Wolf. The writer performed several procedures in data collection. First, the writer repeatedly read the novel that was selected as the object of study to understand the storyline sequentially.

Second, the writer has underlined the dialogue used as research material. Third, the writer continued by identifying the dialogue underlined previously with the theory used. And finally, the writer collected, recorded, and selected the analyzed data to conclude based on the selected issue, namely beauty myths theory by Naomi Wolf. The study data is taken from the novel *The Selection* by Kiera Cass. There is a description of the steps used in the analysis. First, the writer collected data and categorized it based on the issues in theory selected in this study. Next, the writer built an understanding of the content of the novel related to the theory. Finally, the writer structured data is explained in paragraphs.

C. Findings and Discussion

The Concept of Beauty Myth Represented in Kiera Cass's Novel *The Selection*

1. Work

Beauty myths in the concept of work have explained that the more women's career paths increase, the more beauty myths influence to undermine their achievements. It makes women always try to meet beauty standards widely applied in the world of work. The novel represents in the quotation:

It seemed like forever until midnight rolled around. There was a mirror by my door, and I stopped to make sure my hair looked as good as it had this morning and put on a little lip gloss so there'd be some color on my face. Mom was pretty strict about saving makeup for when we had to perform or go out in public, but I usually snuck some on nights like tonight. (Cass, 2012, p.12)

2. Culture

Beauty myths in cultural concepts have described that men see women. Women see themselves seen. It determines not only the relationship of men to women, but the relationship of women to themselves. Culture has portrayed women as objects of art in society. There is a quotation in the novel which tells that all participants who take part in the election contest as the wife of a prince will be broadcast on television and before that every woman is required to change her appearance. The following quotation is depicted in the novel:

The idea of being entered into a contest for the whole country to watch as this stuck-up little wimp picked the most gorgeous and shallow one of the bunch to be the silent, pretty face that stood beside him on TV. (Cass, 2012, p.11)

3. Hunger

Hunger in beauty myths influences women to maintain a healthy diet to maintain an ideal body shape. This myth can affect the mindset of women. In the novel, indicated in the quotation below:

Dinner was disappointing. Next week I'd have to tell my maids to leave some room in the dress for me to eat. (Cass, 2012, p.114)

4. Violence

The appearance of stress gives them an erratic, negative or positive view of themselves. Women obsessed with beauty often give up being tormented by the objects they use. As stated in the quotation below:

Once they were gone, I stepped out of my fancy slippers and stretched my toes on the floor. It felt good, natural, to be barefoot. I went to unpack my things, which was quick. (Cass, 2012, p.70)

The Impacts of Beauty Myths in Kiera Cass's Novel *The Selection*

1. Restrictions on Social Freedom

Beauty myth described in the novel has an impact on several female characters that have been mentioned, one of which is the character America Singer. Mentioned in the quotation below:

“Oh, they come by, but I shoo them away. My girls are too pretty to marry Fives. Kenna got a Four, and I'm sure you can do even better.” Mom took a sip of her tea. (Cass, 2012, p.11)

2. Causing Discomfort

The novel tells of America Singer, who does not like to be called beautiful by the people around him. As shown in the quotation below:

“Please don't call me gorgeous. First my mom, then May, now you. It's getting on my nerves.” (Cass, 2012, p.14)

3. Creating Competitive Conflicts

In this prince's wife selection contest, all met each participant, and of course, all the participants had prepared an appearance that they believed was the prince's criteria. In the quotation below:

“Ah, yes. I was in the room yesterday as a few were drawn; all very lovely girls.” (Cass, 2012, p.38)

4. Losing a Lot of Time

Beauty myth impacts how characters live their daily lives, as experienced by several selection participants who are told in the novel. Here are the quotation:

I thought it had taken me a long time to get ready, but it took the other girls much, much longer. Even when Silvia came to escort us downstairs, we still had to wait for Celeste and Tiny, who, true to her name, had to have her dress taken in. (Cass, 2012, p.78)

D. Conclusion

Based on the data findings and analysis of beauty myths using the theory of Naomi Wolf in the novel *The Selection* by Kiera Cass can identify beauty myths through four concepts that the writer uses in this study, including work, culture, hunger, and violence. The first concept is work, one of the concepts that influence beauty myth through the good-looking specifications needed in the world of work. The second concept is culture, one of concepts that influence beauty myth through one's views and judgments. The third concept is hunger, one of the concepts beauty myths affected by diet or diet to produce a slim body. The last concept is violence, where beauty myths influence women by giving up their bodies in pain for the sake of having the value of beauty. However, in this study, the concept of culture is the most dominant beauty myth concept found in several characters in the novel.

Women are always faced with beauty myths that further increase women's obsession with conforming to beauty standards. Based on several concepts, beauty myth hurts the female characters in the novel. These impacts include restrictions on social freedom, discomfort, competitive conflicts, and losing time. All these things arise because of the fear of not being recognized, seen, or judged, so women always follow and agree to the existence of these myths even if it hurts them.

In this study, the writer experienced difficulties such as classifying quotations based on the concept because the narrative in the novel is not only related to beauty but also to social stratification. In addition, the novel used as the object of research does not represent all the concepts of beauty myth, namely work, culture, sex, religion, hunger, and violence. The study only found four concepts, that are work, culture, hunger and violence, and the impact of beauty myths. Therefore, the writer gives suggestions for other writers who are interested in analyzing beauty myth to use a novel that is full of discussing only beauty, must understand the issue and expand knowledge first, not only from the theory used but also from other related sources, and then read the novel over and over again to underline the quote based on the concept. At least this can help the writer to increase his understanding of the four beauty myth concepts used in this study.

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