

**BEAUTY STEREOTYPE PORTRAYED THROUGH CELIE'S  
PERFORMANCE IN "THE COLOR PURPLE" NOVEL  
BY ALICE WALKER**

\*Annisa Harli Tanjung<sup>1</sup>, Nenden Rikma Dewi<sup>2</sup>

Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Komputer Indonesia,  
Jl. Dipati Ukur 112-116, Bandung, Indonesia  
[anntanjung@gmail.com](mailto:anntanjung@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

The stereotype is commonly used to recognize and identify particular individual or societies. One of stereotype which is depicted in Alice Walker's "The Color Purple" is the beauty. The beauty stereotype is experienced by most of women in the story. They are required to fulfill certain standards in order to be labeled as a graceful and beautiful woman, even that standards are imposed to be decisive for the women to enter society and the society's system. The existing system in the community is majority controlled by thought or ideology that emphasizes the male opinion, or it is also called patriarchy. Celie, an African-American woman, is a main character facing the oppression not only because she is uneducated but also unfit the stereotype. In order to recognize kinds of beauty stereotype, this paper is using descriptive analytic method. Meanwhile, Naomi Wolf (2002) ideas on *Beauty Myth* is used to identify the issue. Through finding and discussions, it can be concluded that body figure and style are two dominant parts in women's beauty stereotype.

**Keywords: Beauty stereotype, Ideology, Patriarchy, Oppression**

**INTRODUCTION**

Stereotype is a condition where a group or dominant society (the aristocrat) shares their ideology or perception, then it becomes similar situation or perception for others (Glăveanu: 2007). It is formed because the society agrees with particular perception controlling the society itself, for example beauty stereotype. The beauty stereotype has different kinds in particular place, because it is also formed by culture. Therefore, the stereotype is not also formed by culture but also created the culture itself. One of stereotype is beauty among society, especially on women. The existing beauty stereotype then becomes the burden toward them and makes unfair judgments. The beauty stereotype creates the boundaries between women and damage in their psychology, women try to compete and fulfill the stereotype of beauty.

However, the condition of beauty stereotype can be seen in *The Color Purple* novel by Alice Walker (1982). The novel depicts the standardization of beauty stereotype in South Georgia through Celie's life. Celie is a main character who was born as a black woman in Southern America. She experiences the stereotype of beauty from her society, black people. In 1960's America, the society, both white and black people, is depicted as a society who has received the stereotype from white people. It is not only influencing their daily life but also their private space. They create blunder

culture in their own society by constructing beauty stereotype mostly for women. They demand that women should have curvy figures, fair skin, and good style. Since Celie does not fulfill the stereotype, she is experiencing discrimination in her appearance. The discrimination can be seen when other character compares and treats Celie differently with other women who fulfilled stereotype.

Therefore, in order to analyze the phenomenon of beauty stereotype in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, ideas of Naomi Wolf (2002) *Beauty Myth* is used. Thus, this paper entitled “Beauty Stereotype Portrayed through Celie’s Performance in “*The Color Purple*” Novel by Alice Walker”. Thus, from the description above, this paper is trying to analyze in what way the beauty stereotype depicts in the novel. The issue is taken from *The Color Purple* novel by Alice Walker. It is chosen since it has clear description on the life of African-American women in South Georgia and how their women face the oppression from the society.

## **METHODS**

In conducting research, there are some important factors for conducting a study which is called as research method. The research method is a scientific way to get data with specific purposes and uses. Related to the issues in the novel, the method applied in this research is descriptive method. James P. Key (1997) stated that descriptive method of research is used to obtain the real information that relates and concerns with the current status of phenomena in order to describe the existing event or condition in a situation.

## **RESULTS**

This paper is using the idea of Naomi Wolf (2002) who stated that women often get the abusive condition and oppression because the stereotype already labeled to them. It is because women are considered as minority and powerless in the society. Because of that, women should follow and fulfill what the dominant social wants, such as the femininity or beauty stereotype. Then, it becomes a necessity for women to comply the standards and stereotypes of beauty stereotype. The beauty stereotype is also triggered by the culture in the society, for example in American beauty magazine or corporation makes different standard of beauty, such as flat chest or bigger is better. While in South Korean the diamond face rational is the perfect of beauty which makes the plastic surgery becomes a necessity in order to get the shape (Susan: 2016). All of them have become the stereotype that is labeled to women.

Because of those stereotypes, women face the discrimination from society’s judgment and unable to become a liberal subject. Hence, it creates the racism and oppression because women should fulfill the stereotype in order to mingle or fit in the society. It sets the mindset that women should be like that to be considered as beautiful and loveable. It makes women think they will be accepted by their appearance which do not represent their real selves. Wolf (2002:3) states that this is because of the dominant social which gets the benefit from stereotype in society, where women become an object in this stereotype, then it creates the oppression toward women. It also represses women’s mindset and their freedom. It is a propaganda that the dominant society made, because through the beauty stereotype women face the discrimination and get oppressed.

Thereby, as the object and subordinate, women compete to fulfill the beauty stereotype in society and unconsciously, women somehow lost themselves in order to get accepted by society and as time goes by women damage their physic and psychology.

## **DISCUSSION**

Set in rural Georgia at 1960, Celie is an African-American woman who comes from lower class family and uneducated person. The story is started by depicting the oppression of Celie's life from Celie's perspectives. In the beginning Celie leads the story from her abusive sexual experience which comes from her step-father. Her step-father also treats Celie differently from her sister because Celie does not fit with the beauty stereotype as the opposite of her sister. Through the experiences, Celie has become a person with lack of confidence of herself. Unconsciously, Celie follows the beauty stereotype and tries to make herself becomes presentable in society. It can be seen when Celie compares her figures with other women who have fulfill the beauty stereotype. The beauty stereotype at that time comes from the society who has been affected by the stereotype of white people or colony. It is because at that time, even though they are African-American people, their stereotype already gets the influences white people stereotype, such as curvy figures and fair or flawless skin, etc.

Through the combination of each stereotype Celie gets the oppression from her father and husband which is shown through their abusive treatment. Celie unconsciously blames herself even blames the God because she does not fit in with the society. "I'm **big**. I can't move fast enough." (1982: 2) from the quotation, it can be seen that unconsciously Celie is already immersed in the society ideology. She depicts and values herself as a big person because the society considers that her body is not a standard of the perfect body. It implies that the standardization makes Celie becomes an oppressed person and judges herself as the unfitted person.

"The most beautiful woman ever saw. She more pretty then my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier than me. I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. Her hair like something tail. She grinning with her foot up on somebody motocar. Her eyes serious tho." (1982: 4)

From the quotation above, it also depicts that the ideology of beauty stereotype has immersed in Celie's mindset. The sentence "The most beautiful women ever saw" shows that Celie is valuing or judging someone from their look based on the beauty stereotype in her mindset. Celie thinks that her figure is not fulfilling the society beauty stereotype due to her appearance.

Other behavior of beautiful assessment shows when Celie unconsciously compares the figure and beauty of her mother and Shug, Celie's sister, in the following sentence: "She more pretty then my mama". Every daughter usually has admiration on her mother, yet Celie thinks that her mother's beauty is not flawless. Then, Celie also compares herself with Shug. From those behavior means the standardization of beauty stereotype has made a person likes to compare one thing to another and becomes a judgmental person. Because of those behaviors, people often judge people by their appearance. This leads to competition for each woman in order to get the recognition and puts women in unfavorable conditions where they should turn themselves in order

to get accepted or loved. In fact, the change even makes women sacrifice their lives, for example the plastic surgery.

In Celie's life, she often gets beaten by her step-father because she is not beautiful as her sister Nettie. Her appearance is not appealing according to her father, and the father's opinion is society's voice. Celie is described as a woman with ordinary complexion and barely attractive. She is as well assumed as unable to mingle and blend in like other women. However, she tries to follow the society's requirement and fails. It can be seen in the quotation below.

“I tell him I can fix myself up for him. I duck into my room and come out wearing horsehair, feathers, and a pair of our new mammy high heel shoes. He beat me for dressing trampy but he do it to me anyway.” (1982: 4).

The quotation above represents that Celie tries to follow and fit in to the society's beauty standard. The beauty standard that makes her become someone else. The phrase 'I can fix myself up' represents that Celie is not fit the beauty stereotype. It implies that Celie does not change herself because she wants it but she should fit in. Besides, she mentions word 'fix' which means Celie categorized herself as the unfixed thing. That is why Celie aims to fix herself in order to get the same treatment as other women, Nettie and Shug a character who are present the exact beauty stereotype. Thus, Beauty stereotype who presents and created from patriarchal society which is represent in the next word 'him'. From the pronoun 'him', it implies that Celie should and wants to fix herself because of someone, a man.

The sentence shows Celie dresses up as other women at that time which used horsehair, feathers, and pair of high heel shoes. Those accessories are her mother accessories, it implies that she tries to be other person who is considered as a beautiful woman. It can be stated that Celie is not herself anymore because of that mindset. From the passages of narration, Celie states, her acts make her getting beaten by her step-father. It implicates that Celie does not fit to wear and become a beautiful person, because she does not have the standardization.

## **CONCLUSION**

The standard from society creates a boundaries and competition for some women. It is because women try to fill and fit to the standard and compete to get the recognition in society. It makes a disadvantage toward women because it damages the true identity of women themselves. As seen in Celie's life she got suffered and oppression because she was trying to fit and fulfill the standard in order to be accepted. She could not find what she wants, her true self, and restrain herself to get the liberation. Besides the standard of beauty stereotype restraining the liberation of women, it also damages the psychology of women. It is because women try to change themselves become someone else which is different from them. Thus, the beauty stereotype damages women psychologically and physically.

Then, after she figures the beauty stereotype is no longer needed and does not have the benefit for herself, she gets the freedom from what she desires to be. She can liberate herself and becomes an independent woman when she liberates from its stereotype.

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