

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

When it comes to beauty, people may have struggled to define it, but they do recognize it when they see it. Even though people may have trouble defining beauty, there is a constructed ideal beauty in every generation and society. The concept of ideal beauty does not naturally exist in this world or even in our mind or ourselves, in fact, the ideal beauty is a concept that emerges as the impact of patriarchal culture (Wolf 2002, 14). Since the existence of ideal beauty is emerged by the patriarchal culture, men's culture has the power to create the concept of ideal beauty. In addition, it is stated by Wolf (2002, 59) that women are merely "beauties" in men's culture for that culture to keep being held by men with power. Moreover, when women in men's culture demonstrate a character, they are considered as unattractive (Wolf 2002, 59). Furthermore, people unconsciously accept the concept of ideal beauty, they do not even realize that it really affects the way they are thinking and behaving. In addition, Wolf also has stated in her beauty myth theory that women's growth is obstructed by the use of female beauty images as a political weapon (Wolf 2002, 10).

In the mission of constructing people's ideas about the concept of ideal beauty, media has a big role in it. The majority of concepts of ideal beauty are shaped by the media, and women are continually blasted with information from the media, which conveys and promotes fashion and ideal beauty through pictures

of models in a multiple of different media formats (Yan and Bissell 2014). Media shows the image of women that are portrayed as beautiful from the way they look, for example, women that have an ideal body posture, facial structure, skin color, hair type, and etc. The media often favors slender, youthful, and able-bodied women, it also favors height and "whiteness," as expressed by light complexion and hair (Kwan 2016). The media normally show a model that fits into the impossible standards of beauty, they display a figure that is far from the average of women in society. Media force people to think that someone who does not fit in with the ideals of beauty, like heavy-set people, racial and ethnic minorities, and those with impairments are not appreciated and considered as less attractive (Kwan 2016).

Media unconsciously force women to comply with the constructed ideal beauty that the society has created in the intention of favoring a certain party (Englis, Michael and Richard 1994). In this case, media is addressed as one of political power that used in patriarchal culture. Moreover, media cannot be separated from the advertisement industry. Many advertisements advertise that everyone can be beautiful if they consume certain products or perform certain treatments (Laham 2020). From time to time, consumers do not even realize that media shapes them to fit into the constructed ideal beauty by also promoting a certain beauty products through the media. Furthermore, it is stated that beauty is a concept that differs from one culture to the next and evolves with time (Frith, Shaw and Cheng 2005). So, with the beauty trends that evolve and change with

time, beauty trends make many women seem to be competing to achieve the trends that the media has created through magazine, television, and advertisement.

Beauty trends include the trends of doing a plastic surgery. People said that to be beautiful, someone must suffer. Plastic surgery is concerned with the removal, repair, replacement, and reconstruction of abnormalities in the shape and function of the skin and its underlying anatomic structures. Plastic surgery is commonly used for health, but there is also cosmetic surgery that is used for aesthetic purposes. According to King (2020), cosmetic surgery of anatomical parts with unsatisfactory shape is also performed via plastic surgery. Women tend to do cosmetic surgery to change their physical appearance to appear more beautiful and to get themselves fit into the constructed ideal beauty.

The constructed ideal beauty also affects women at work. There is a thing called PBQ (professional beauty qualification) that is used in workplace to give a low-risk, low-cost method of discriminating against women. The PBQ consists of three lies: (1) "Beauty" defined as a valid and required quality for a woman to raise power. (2) "Beauty" is something that every woman may achieve through hard work and persistence. (3) Working women were unconsciously persuaded that they had to think about "beauty" in a way that increasingly damaged them, and think that these concepts were a result of the women's movement's accomplishments (Wolf 2002, 28).

The object of this study is a novel entitled *If I Had Your Face* written by Frances Cha. The novel was published on 21st April 2020 by Penguin Books. *If I*

Had Your Face also had been long listed for the Dylan Thomas Prize 2021. The novel is told from the point of view of four girls named Kyuri, Miho, Ara, and Wonna that are living in the same building. In addition, there is also Sujin, whose story is being told by them. They all have different and complex stories and they try to survive living in Korean society where a world is defined by impossible standards of beauty. The first girl, Kyuri, works as a hostess in a top room salon after undergoing severe plastic surgery. The second girl is Miho, she is Kyuri's roommate. Miho is an orphan and now living as an artist. The third girl is Ara, she is a hairdresser who is mute and obsessed with K-Pop artists. There is also Sujin, Ara's flat mate, who wants to get plastic surgery in order to change her life. Lastly, there is Wonna and her husband, who is trying to have a child that they do not know how they will be able to raise in Korea's harsh economy.

Looking at the setting of *If I Had Your Face* novel, it is clear that the novel is being set in nowadays South Korean society in which beauty industry is massive. The Korean beauty industry is one of the ways to construct the ideal beauty, on top of that, Korean beauty industry are also includes the cosmetic surgery industry. In this case, Lee (2016) has stated that the consumption of cosmetic surgery in Korea is one of the biggest feminist issues. Korean feminists also see lookism in Korea as one of the main causes of cosmetic surgery consumption. Lookism is a control mechanism that disciplines women's actions and also relations to their own bodies. Furthermore, lookism is forceful and powerful, because if someone complies with it, they are being benefited, however, if someone does not comply with it there are serious consequences; discrimination

in job seeking and marriage (Lee 2016). In addition, Korea uses the politics of beauty to restrict women in many aspects of their life, it is not only oppressive but also a part of the oppression system to restrict women (Lee 2016).

Furthermore, it can be said that media in Korea are mostly managed under certain institutions, and many institution in Korea are held by the men with power. In this case, media are also considered as one of the patriarchal institutions that construct the ideal beauty (Lee 2016). As a tool for proving that media is part of patriarchal institutions, there is a magazine that was intentionally created for women. Women's magazines have tactics to construct women's ideas about the ideal beauty, which include airbrushing the model face in the magazine, promoting must-have products, and unconsciously making many women having insecurities about their weight, looks, and the other factors (Lee 2016). Through magazines, media promote figures that fit into the constructed ideal beauty in order to make the idea they suggest more convincing that everyone should fit into a certain ideal of beauty. In addition, media in Korea often show the existence of the K-Pop industry and its beauty industry.

K-Pop industry and Korean beauty industry are related to each other in such a way. The K-pop industry become more famous nowadays because of the rise of social media platforms, in this case many South Korean entertainment companies often use social media platforms to promote their pop star as their primary platform for launching and maintaining their worldwide pop stars' success. It is linked with the South Korean beauty industry because the visual/physical

appearance of the pop artists is the driving force behind the South Korean popular music industry and it is one of the most important aspects of K-global pop's production and distribution (Lee 2016). Because of that, many entertainment companies set and control their K-Pop artist's looks, which are subsequently commercialized alongside their music and dancing (Lee 2016). As the results, the visual/physical appearance of the artists unconsciously sets Korean ideal beauty that often favoring someone who has fair skin, double eyelids, slim and flat jawlines, etc. (Jacobs and Zheng 2018).

Furthermore, the beauty industry in South Korea has strict and high standards of ideal beauty which can be seen through many model figures in many media formats such as magazine, and television that portray women with certain beauty standards. In this case, South Korean beauty industry is mostly famous because of its skincare industry that sells face masks, serum, ampoule, moisturizer, toner, etc., that are branded to make someone look beautiful. The Korean beauty industry is also famous for its cosmetic surgery procedure. Cosmetic surgery clinics that also offered skin treatments can be found anywhere in Korea, for example in a shopping mall, it can be found almost anywhere because it becomes increasingly popular right now, it is just like a nail and beauty salon that can be found anywhere (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012). Furthermore, in Korean society, there is a set of beliefs that cosmetic surgery that is considered successful should look as natural as possible in order to accentuate Korean women's traits, and it also believed that if someone is having surgery that is leaving visible signs of their treatments it is often considered as a failed surgery (Holliday and Elfving-

Hwang 2012). Moreover, with the rising of cosmetic surgery procedures in Korea, there have been many clinical studies agreeing that surgery is a painful procedure, but the cosmetic surgery clinics in Korea often downplay the negative side effects of the surgery. Instead of revealing the downside of cosmetic surgery they just emphasize the positive advantages with 'before and after' photographs of the cosmetic surgery clients, so that many women want to do the procedures (Holliday and Elfving-Hwang 2012). To support that, Howard has also stated in his previous study that along with the growth of "lookism" in South Korea, cosmetic surgery has evolved from a minor practice to a mainstream practice in Korean society (Park, Myers and Langstein 2019).

Moreover, in South Korea, physical appearance is increasingly seen as a critical aspect of women's success (Park, Myers and Langstein 2019). Many women are often judged just by their looks and it led many women to seek cosmetic surgery as a method of achieving professional and social success. Moreover, based on the previous study by Park and Langstein, compared to males, females had a greater percentage of plastic surgery procedures, the study shows that female participants reached 22.4% and male participants reached 14.8% out of the total percentages (Park, Myers and Langstein 2019). The percentages of female participants that has done plastic surgery procedure is higher than male participants because in South Korea, women's physical appearance is valued more than men's in terms of relationships and accomplishments (Park, Myers and Langstein 2019). Physical appearance is crucial when looking for a job, and cosmetic surgery to improve appearance

would be very beneficial, it may indeed be a positive aspect in the recruiting process for South Korean young adults, and it makes cosmetic surgery a significant tactic for gaining an opportunity when looking for a job.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the Korean plastic surgery industry began and grew as a result of the influence of other nations, Korea is today become the most influential country in the world of plastic surgery. In the 1960s and 1970s, when Korea's economy increased rapidly as a result of the "Miracle on the Han River," the field of plastic surgery in Korea improved significantly in both skills and knowledge (Y. B. Kim 2015). Cosmetic surgery has become much more accessible for many people as a result of advances in medical technology and the fast expansion of web-based mass media and social networking services. The number of persons receiving cosmetic surgery in South Korea, in particular, has been quickly growing, as well as the cosmetic surgery-related research (Y. B. Kim 2015). This high level of acceptability for doing cosmetic surgery in South Korea has driven many people in Korea for having cosmetic surgery procedures. Furthermore, it is also stated by Seo, Chung, and Kim (2018) that many people in South Korea have a desire for doing cosmetic surgery procedures because of its effectiveness in improving themselves and also their social life.

After reading the object of the study, this study only focuses on revealing the depiction of ideal beauty in *If I Had Your Face* novel and discovering the impact of constructed ideal beauty concept on the characterization of Sujin and Kyuri. It mainly focuses on identifying Sujin and Kyuri characters since both of the

characters are the ones who affected the most by the constructed ideal beauty compared to the other characters. Therefore, to unravel the issue of constructed ideal beauty, the beauty myth theory by Naomi Wolf is used.

According to the Beauty Myth Theory, beauty myth is classified into six aspects which are work, culture, religion, sex, hunger, and violence (Wolf 2002). However, this study only reveals the depiction of the constructed ideal beauty in *If I Had Your Face* by looking through three aspects; culture (media), violence (plastic surgery), and work. In cultural aspects, media such as magazines and television plays a big role to shape women's way of thinking that they need to fit in into the constructed ideal beauty. In the novel, this issue is being depicted through how the magazines, television, movies, and website articles promote the ideal beauty. Furthermore, in violent aspects, Naomi Wolf explains that woman must suffer to get herself beautiful and she considers plastic surgery as one of the methods to do. The issue of violence to fit into the ideal beauty is being portrayed through the plastic surgery industry being depicted in the novel. Moreover, in work aspects, women are facing discrimination in workplace based on their looks. In *If I Had Your Face* novel, such issues are depicted by the existence of room salon that often hires beautiful women and pays them big amount of money for sitting next to men and pouring liquor for them.

On top of that, since both Sujin and Kyuri's mindset are really affected by the concept of constructed ideal beauty, this study tries to discover the effect of constructed ideal beauty by looking through the psychological effects of

constructed ideal beauty in culture (media), violence (plastic surgery), and work aspects on Sujin and Kyuri characterization. This study focuses on how the characters of Sujin and Kyuri have to deal with insecurity and judgmental issues caused by the existence of the constructed ideal beauty in the society.

Since the object of this study is relatively new, there are no previous studies that use *If I Had Your Face* novel as their object of the study. However, this study found some related studies that focuses on the same topic which is the constructed ideal beauty. The first related study is by Asmarani (2016) entitled *The Impacts of The Beauty Myth on The Existential Freedom of Pecola in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*. The gap between Asmarani's study and this study is that Asmarani's study shows movie as the media that shapes the images of ideal beauty whereas this study shows magazines, movies, television, and website articles as the media that shape the concept of ideal beauty. This study also enriches and complements what Asmarani's study has said about how the media shapes women to fit into the constructed ideal of beauty.

The second related study by Fortuna (2016) shows the depiction of the ideal beauty concept in *Uglies* novel that can only be fulfilled by doing plastic surgery. Fortuna's study helps this study to have a better understanding towards the topic of violence that is used to fulfill the concept of ideal beauty. The third related is a study by Knowles (2016), the study shows the depiction of the beauty myth applied in the workplace. Close to the related study by Knowles, this study also focuses on how beauty myth works as a restriction to women in the workplace,

meanwhile, the gap between this study and Knowles's study is that the object of Knowles's study portrays the entertainment industry as women's workplace whereas *If I Had Your Face* portrays room salon industry as women's workplace which will result in a different outcome. All in all, compared to all those related studies, this study focuses on revealing the cultural, violence, and work aspects whereas all of the related studies only focus on one of each aspect of the beauty myth theory by Naomi Wolf.

1.2. Statements of the Problem

1. How is the concept of constructed ideal beauty depicted in *If I Had Your Face*?
2. In what ways do the impacts of the constructed ideal beauty concept affect the characterization of Sujin and Kyuri?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. To reveal the depiction of the constructed ideal beauty in *If I Had Your Face*.
2. To discover the impact of constructed ideal beauty concept on the characterization of Sujin and Kyuri.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study attempts to gain a deeper understanding towards the concept of ideal beauty and their effect on an individual and society. Furthermore, the writer hopes that this study can provide more knowledge about the truth behind the

concept of ideal beauty and how it really affects people and society's way of behaving and thinking. The result of this study is also expected to help academics, especially literature students of the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga, who are interested in studying the topic of constructed ideal beauty using beauty myth theory by Naomi wolf.

1.5. Definitions of Key-Terms

Ideal Beauty: The quality of "beauty" exists objectively and universally. Men must want to own women who portray it, and women must want to embody it (Wolf 2002).

Media: The term "media" refers to technology that transmits messages to audiences in various areas of a region, country, or even the globe (Laughey 2007).

Plastic Surgery: Plastic surgery is concerned with the removal, repair, replacement, and reconstruction of abnormalities in the shape and function of the skin and its underlying anatomic structures. Cosmetic surgery of anatomical parts with unsatisfactory shape is also performed via plastic surgery (King 2020).

Insecurity: Insecurity is a sense of uncertainty and not being good enough about themselves. It causes worry about dealing with particular events, relationships, and achieving goals (Brennan 2020).

Judgmental: The act of criticizing another person, group of people, idea, or situation, which leads to problems such as low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Aletheia 2021).