

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Becoming and being recognized as pretty is what most women wanted to be called, but every designation has its own set of requirements. The requirement to become beautiful is called a “standard,” derived from society’s construction. As the era have evolved, so does the standards of beauty. In Western culture, being considered beautiful is identical to having a thin and slender body, straight hair, etc. (Wolf 2002). A study conducted by Vela and Meyrasyawati (2016) shows that society has constructed beauty standards that encourage someone to fulfill the beauty myths, that being beautiful means she has to possess a stereotyped behavior and appearance. Thus, this research intends to investigate the negative body image experienced by a ballerina in connection to the ideals of beauty and appearances. The influence of the characterized ideal body image of the ballerina will also be examined in terms of self-perception and coping strategy.

There is a downside to every standard. Being beautiful is not only seen from the face but also the body shape. One of the causes that encourages this myth is an art performance, namely ballet. To be beautiful one must possess a standard of beauty; so does ballet. The requirement to be a good ballerina is very specific (Pickard 2012). A good body proportion must be fulfilled by ballerinas because the

main weight of ballet performance is supported by the flexibility, strength, and balance of their legs, especially their feet and toes (Kolb and Kalogeropoulou 2012). Ballerinas become self-conscious about their body image because they are constantly exposed to a mirror to see their progress and the ideal body they must achieve (Cardoso, et al. 2017, Doria and Numer 2022). The ideal body shape requirements in ballet, then, have triggered them to experience eating disturbance since they want to appear as thin as possible for the aesthetic of the performance (Silverii, et al. 2021).

The issue of ballet dancers can be linked to a mental illness which affects most western women and young females. The mental disturbance that is continuously experienced by these females is known as an eating disorder. The issue is called “mental disturbance” because it impacts one’s understanding of how beauty works (Wolf 2002). The concept that westerners are more prone to having an eating issue is decades old. Eating disorder research has expanded in the last decade. A recent study examined the sociocultural elements that contribute to the development and manifestation of eating disorders (Halbeisen, Brandt and Paslakis 2022). However, there is a general lack of evidence in this study, with the vast majority of participants coming from European and US-American backgrounds, indicating where eating disturbance first appeared and was experienced.

Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and binge nervosa are mental illnesses that often occur and are discussed in the West. The signs of anorexia itself are quite clear for sufferers, namely limiting themselves to eating, which causes extreme hunger, and starvation syndrome (Peterson and Fuller 2019). Mental

illnesses can be caused by a variety of factors, social pressure or a culture that values ideal beauty standards and social media (Chua and Chang 2016). Among women and female youth, multiple types of body dissatisfaction and anxiety over one's appearance are shown to be closely linked to an unhealthy relationship with food and social media. Moreover, body dissatisfaction and the desire for a slimmer body image were shown to be linked in research conducted by Chua and Chang (2016) and Aparicio-Martinez et al. (2019).

As the issue of negative body image has been significantly discussed by many intellectuals and psychologists in their books, journals, and other media; such as films. By focusing on the lived experiences of individuals who are identified as having this mental illness, films have the potential to convey critical societal messages via a visual language (Tyali 2015) that engages with ideal beauty standards that are used against women (Wolf 2002). A short film entitled *I Love Ana* (2021) directed by Alyssa G. Mullings and released in 2021 specifically discusses a disordered eating experience by Mars, a female youth who lives in America. She has a negative body image towards herself that is caused by the dance class, namely ballet. The critical appraisal in ballet class has encouraged her to join a pro-anorexia group called “I Love Ana” on social media to help her achieve what society demands her to be.

The issue of the object chosen is important to be discussed because beauty myths usually deal with the importance of appearance for love, or to attract the opposite sex (male) (Wardani 2011). In this film, the main reason for someone to have an ideal body and become anorexic is because she wants to achieve

recognition (Doria and Numer 2022). In performing the techniques, ballerinas are known for their grace, elegance, flexibility, and strength (McCormack, et al. 2018). As the early female ballet performance was performed by thin females (Guest and Kant 2020), it is hard for other females that genetically do not match the thin body of ballet performance (Angyal 2021). The leanness of ballet performance is used to ease the ballerinas into performing the movement, while in fact, the rule has made ballerinas dissatisfied and concerned about their physical appearance (Arcelus, Witcomb and Mitchell 2014). Several studies that have the same issue of pursuing body ideals to gain recognition have also been published in several journals.

According to a recent study, high-performance sports, such as gymnastics, dancing, skating, swimming, and running, all demand an elevated degree of self-discipline, perfectionism, and control over food. Ballet dancers have a greater incidence of perfectionism, which is congruent with their greater levels of restraint and desire for thinness. Sustaining thinness may have an adaptive role in achieving performance in ballet (Tosi, et al. 2019). Therefore, ballet dancers may be at a higher risk of developing anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders as a result of their training (Silverii, et al. 2021).

A study conducted by Lubianti, Agustina, and Utami (2020) found that the anorexic behavior experienced by Ellen in the *To The Bone* film is a form of looking for attention from her parents, especially her mother. Ellen's refusal to eat is one of her strategies for gaining her parents' love and attention. Her parents' divorce triggers her stress and makes her eat less, and as her parents do not recognize it, she becomes anorexic. This indicates that anorexic behavior is not only done by female

youth to attract the person of interest. Any stressor in life, such as a parents' divorce can trigger someone to have an eating disorder behavior.

Another study found that models helped people perceive the importance of what they wear. Goods, photographs, and people participated in these networks to circulate beneficial images and objects. In these systems, models performed useful activities when working and when not (Wissinger 2009). This was connected to how body image was vital for modeling and fashion since physical appearance was the key draw for consumers (Azhar 2016). The fashion business needs thin models since the sample size was the designer's first product (Volonté 2017). According to other studies, female athletes might be more exposed to eating problems and body image concerns due to running's body image ideals. The ideal "runner figure" was intertwined with the assumption that a lower body weight improved athletic performance (Carson, et al. 2020).

The studies above indicate that there are many factors that cause someone to be concerned about their body. A professional achievement or a family issue may be the triggering factors for someone to have a negative body image and experience eating disorders. Mars, as she wants to learn ballet better, believes that the thin body of a general ballerina must be pursued to perfect her movement and appraised by the coach.

As Wolf (2002) argued, having a negative body image may be caused by feeling pressured to measure up to an ideal body type or look and by experiencing guilt or other unpleasant feelings when we believe ourselves to be falling short of

beauty standards. Ballet is one of the institutions that promoting that the value of these “perfect” and unreal body types through self-image exposure in the mirror, so they become aware of their imperfections to these “ideal” and unattainable body types (Doria and Numer 2022). The influence of their friends, which starts to play a larger part in reaffirming what an ideal physique looks like throughout puberty, is another regular occurrence. In children and youth, body dissatisfaction, poor eating habits, and depressive symptoms have been related to the internalization of this ideal (Erikson 1994). This is shown in the short film by how the ballet class entails the students having slim bodies. Moreover, Mars’ coach’s act of comparing Mars to two of her peers makes her think that the best body representation of a ballerina should be thin enough to perform the perfect movement, not to mention the body image she saw on her phone.

Mars, as the main character, has experienced the general health problems that most ballerinas have (Barlaan 2019). According to Bordo (1993), public personalities are portrayed similarly. This means they will ignore differences that disrupt norms and identities. These homogenized images are employed as frames against which the self-measured, assessed, restrained, and adjusted, altering female adults' and youth's ideas of femininity or beauty. According to Guest and Kant (2020), Marie Camargo's light and airy movements in entrechat and cabriole (jumping movements traditionally done by males) have made her body measurement a criterion for selecting excellent ballerinas (slender body with medium height). Mars' master wants Mars to have a ballerina body shape, which hurts her self-esteem (Barlaan 2019).

The issue depicted by the short film chosen is interesting to be analyzed because the *I Love Ana* (2021) short film tries to capture an eating disturbance, specifically anorexia nervosa, that is usually experienced by ballerinas (Barlaan 2019). The director argued that she wanted to show how mental illness might affect anyone. Unlike in the United States, mental illness is rarely discussed in other countries. A lack of public discussion on eating disorders makes it difficult for Mars' parents, especially her mother, to grasp what she is going through (Community 2021). The influence of "I Love Ana" group chat on Mars' perspective of beauty standards and the socio-cultural aspects of ballet are also crucial in making her believe: what is right to be done and what is preferred in appearances that are recognized as perfect. Mars' obsession with body image has forced her to doubt her self-perception of her body because of the demands of the ballet class.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

1. How is the beauty myth portrayed in this short film?
2. How is Mars repressed by the society?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Using the information provided in the previous section, the writer created several research objectives such as follows:

1. To examine the beauty myth portrayed in this short film, and
2. To examine the society's repression towards Mars, as the main character.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study is to further comprehend the prevalence of the beauty myth, which in this case, is through the instruments of the representatives of ballet class and social media. As such ramifications from the beauty myth may affect the development of youth's identity, the writer accentuates the focus narrowed to portrayal regarding beauty myth focus, as this study is concentrated towards humanities study. In this case, those who join ballet or any other institution that focuses on appearance are more likely to have problems eating to be successful and gain professional approval, in which traditional beauty standards are still regarded to be a determinant factor of acceptance. Therefore, this study highlights the fact that a strict standard body shape is still considered to be the accepted establishment. It may affect individuals in any sector of life since the dominant culture of the place where they live has a significant influence on their ideas. Moreover, the writer expects that this study will raise awareness about the effect of beauty standards on Indonesian women and female youth.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

Beauty myth : The pressure to comply with the beauty standards of femininity in an effort to match the ideal pictures of womanhood offered by the media and popular culture (Wolf 2002).

- Eating disorder : Body dissatisfaction and anxiety over one's appearance were shown to be closely linked to an unhealthy relationship with food (Aparicio-Martinez, et al. 2019).
- Repression : The tendency to avoid one's negative emotions and thoughts in order to protect one's good self-image to maintain their relationship with others by not expressing themselves (Bachner-Melman, et al. 2022).
- Youth : A phase of adjustment of a role from childhood to adulthood (Schäfer 2015).