

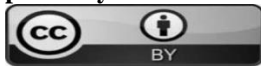


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**Defying Hyperreal Beauty in Julie Murphy's Dumplin'****A B S T R A C T**

This paper examines the concept of beauty standards in Julie Murphy's novel Dumplin' based on Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. The paper explores how society's perception of beauty has been constructed and distorted through media, advertising, and digital manipulation. Hyperreality refers to a condition in which the boundary between reality and simulation becomes blurred, resulting in an exaggerated and idealized representation of reality. Beauty standards, traditionally influenced by cultural norms and ideals, have now become increasingly mediated and manufactured. The study explores the role of positivity and confidence in defying the negative impacts of beauty industry. Furthermore, the paper analyzes the protagonists attempt to challenge hyperreal beauty standards as they can cause body image dissatisfaction and low self-esteem.

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تحدي جمال الواقع الافتراضي في رواية دامبلين لجولي مورفي

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الخلاصة

تناقش هذه الورقة مفهوم معايير الجمال في رواية دامبلين للكاتبة جولي مورفي، استنادًا إلى نظرية الواقعية الافتراضية لجان بودريار. تستكشف الورقة كيف تم بناء وتشويه تصور المجتمع للجمال من خلال وسائط الإعلام والإعلان والتلاعب الرقمي. الواقعية الافتراضية تشير إلى حالة تصبح فيها الحدود بين الواقع والمحاكاة غامضة، مما يؤدي إلى تمثيل مبالغ فيه ومثالي للواقع. معايير الجمال، التي تأثرت تقليديًا بالقيم والمثل الثقافية، أصبحت الآن تتأثر بالأعلام بشكل متزايد. تستكشف الدراسة دور الإيجابية والثقة في التصدي للتأثيرات السلبية لصناعة الجمال. علاوة على ذلك، تحلل الورقة محاولة الشخصيات الرئيسية لتحدي معايير الجمال الافتراضية بما أنها يمكن أن تسبب عدم الرضا عن الصورة الجسدية وانخفاض التقدير الذاتي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الواقعية الزائفة، معايير الجمال، جولي مورفي، دامبلين، الإيجابية.

Introduction

Throughout history, there has been a prevalent idea that the reality people perceive may not be as real as they believe it to be. This notion is exemplified in various philosophical and religious traditions. For instance, the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi's butterfly dream narrative presents a scenario where he dreams of being a butterfly, but upon waking up, he is unsure whether he is a man who dreamt of being a butterfly or a butterfly that is now dreaming of being a man. This story highlights the concept that our understanding of reality is subjective and possibly flawed (Moeller, 2006, p. 44). This idea is well-known to be found in Buddhism. The Buddhist concept of 'anicca' emphasizes the idea of impermanence and the transitory nature of all phenomena. According to the *Buddhist Dictionary*, 'anicca' means that everything is in a constant state of flux, and our attachment to material possessions and our self-identities only serves to create suffering. Therefore, the idea of reality being an illusion is crucial in Buddhism as it promotes detachment and a focus on spiritual development (Nyanatiloka, 2004, pp. 16-17).

Jean Baudrillard, a postmodern philosopher, introduces the idea of simulacra, which relates to the simulation of real-world processes or systems. According to Baudrillard, simulacra are not faithful representations of reality but instead create their own reality, which bears no relation to the original. Baudrillard coins the term hyperreality to describe this new reality. He describes hyperreality as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1). This concept is particularly relevant in a world where technology and media can create simulated realities that are increasingly difficult to distinguish from actual reality.

Jean Baudrillard developed the theory of hyperreality in the 1980s. According to Baudrillard, hyperreality is a state in which the boundary between reality and simulation becomes blurred. In other words, it is a condition in which the real and the simulated become indistinguishable from each other:

No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept.
No more imaginary coextensivity: it is genetic miniaturization that is the dimension of simulation. [...] Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference, between one and the other, that constituted the charm of abstraction (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2).

The concept of hyperreality has been extensively studied by theorists in the fields of philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies. According to Baudrillard, hyperreality causes the blurring of boundaries between the real and the imaginary, resulting in a state where the distinction between the two becomes irrelevant. He says that in this new world of hyperreality truth loses its value, it “is no longer the reflexive truth of the mirror, nor the perspectival truth” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 29). In today's consumer society, hyperreality plays a crucial role in the way products are marketed and consumed through the Medea.

Baudrillard's insights remain as relevant and thought-provoking as ever. Hyperreality plays a significant role in the way products are marketed, consumed, and designed. Advertisements create hyperreal worlds that promote products by creating a desire for an idealized version of reality. Social media platforms have created a new form of hyperreality that blurs the lines between the real and the simulated. As society continues to grapple with the effects of hyperreality on product consumption, it is essential to consider the implications of the hyperreal world for both individuals and the planet.

Baudrillard's ideas about media have been supported by empirical research. Studies have shown that exposure to media representations can influence people's attitudes and behaviors. For instance, a study by Greenberg and colleagues claimed “Thin-ideal media affects some, but not most, viewers in a meta-analytic review of body dissatisfaction in women and men” (2019), and found that exposure to media images of thin models increased women's dissatisfaction with their bodies. This happens because “In the postmodern world, beauty is seen in a new light; it is [...] a hyperreal construct, in which beauty is based on other images of beauty promoted by the media” (Mankhi, 2022, p. 796).

Baudrillard also believes that the media creates a desire for products and experiences that are not necessary for survival, but that are sold to people as essential to their well-being; “People have the desire to take everything, to pillage everything, to swallow everything, to manipulate everything. Seeing, deciphering, learning does not touch them. The only massive affect is that of manipulation” (Baudrillard *Simulation and Simulacra* 69). This means that the media is a key driver of consumerism, and that it plays a crucial role in shaping people's desires and aspirations. The following section extends the findings of Baudrillard by applying the notion of hyperreality to the beauty ideals in *Dumplin'*

1.1. Embracing the Body image in *Dumplin'*

Julie Murphy's novel *Dumplin'* is initially published in 2015. The novel has been translated into various languages including German, French, Bulgarian, Swedish, Spanish,

Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, and more. It has received numerous awards, gaining recognition for its exploration of challenging societal norms surrounding the ideal body. The popularity of *Dumplin'* in the young adult category led to its adaptation into a Netflix film in 2018. The film received positive reviews, with a high rating from critics and audience alike (Septiani *et al.*, 2021, p. 101).

Dumplin' tells the story of Willowdean, a young woman with a larger body size who rebels against her mother's obsession with dieting and embraces her own self-image. She decides to challenge the conventional notion that beauty is synonymous with an ideal body by entering a beauty contest, even though her mother is a former winner and one of the judges. Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'* is recognized for its portrayal of the social construction of body ideals and offers insights into the worldview of a specific social group (Ward, 2016, p. 83). The journalist Grace McDonald describes the novel saying, "[t]his mix of characters evokes thought, laughter, and tears from audience members, thanks to the realistic relationships broken and repaired throughout the movie" (2019, p. 9).

The novel is set in a small town in Texas and follows Willowdean during the end of her sophomore year and the first semester of her junior year. This period coincides with the town's pageant season, a time when everyone is focused on the annual Miss Teen Blue Bonnet beauty pageant. In addition to the usual obsession with Texas high school football, the people of Clover City are particularly fixated on this pageant. Willowdean's mother, who used to be a winner and now helps organize the pageant, constantly reminds her of its importance. However, Willowdean can't escape the feeling that her mother is ashamed of having a daughter who is overweight and doesn't fit the mold of a typical pageant contestant.

Willowdean's mother reinforces her feelings of shame through subtle actions, like making Willowdean watch a TV show called *The Biggest Loser* and commenting on how inspiring the contestants are in their attempt to lose weight. Although her mother has stopped pressuring Willowdean to go on diets and has mostly stopped making direct comments about her size, Willowdean is under no illusions about her mother's true feels. She continues to grapple with the emotional impact of her mother's disapproval and the societal pressure to conform to certain beauty standards: "My body is the villain. That's how [my mother] sees it. It's a prison, keeping the better, thinner version of me locked away. But she's wrong" (Murphy, 2015, p. 133). In her focus on the body, Murphy stresses an essential fact of the current reality, which is "the body is seen as the essential object through which power relations are created and challenged" (Keif & Hamad, 2022, p. 458). In fact, the body and the mind of the characters are brought to the center of events which is a phenomena that has started to shape contemporary literature. this makes contemporary works different from their predecessors which focused on "[t]he interior struggle [...] to express one's self--the struggle between Human Nature and the Human Mind," which was a key in the development of modern thinking (Nati, 2014, p. 2016).

Jean Baudrillard, in his *Selected Writing*, observes that everything influences people today is created by an ideology of consumption, even when it comes to beauty standards. He states that the interplay between competition, personalization, and the social perception of things, like beauty, reveals a pervasive system of influence. The shift of competition from production to consumption has transformed the way people view each other (1988, p. 10).

Constant exposure to beauty products and beauty competitions encourage people to compete in terms of their possessions, presentation, and preferences instead of their productivity and qualities of their characters.

In her attempt to challenge beauty standards, Willowdean continually addresses the challenges faced by fat people. She reflects “The word *fat* makes people uncomfortable. But when you see me, the first thing you notice is my body. And my body is fat” (p. 9). The writer demonstrates that physical appearance has the supremacy in forming first impressions. People do not wait to talk to Willowdean to know her character or her kind heart, they form a first judgment based on her plus sized body. Willowdean confirms that “ It’s like how I notice some girls have big boobs or shiny hair or knobby knees. Those things are okay to say. But the word *fat*, the one that best describes me, makes lips frown and cheeks lose their color” (p. 9).

Julie Murphy's titles her novel as, *Dumplin': Go Big or Go Home*, to distinguish her ‘big’ character’s positivity and resilience. Willowdean Dickson, is a distinguished character in Young adult fiction because she does not adhere to the norms of ‘idealism’ like other novels. In fact, Willowdean never embarks on a weight loss journey throughout the entire story. The central focus of the book is not about her shedding pounds, but rather about her navigating the typical challenges faced by teenagers when they are fat. It is worth noting that, at the beginning of the book, Willowdean firmly believes she has always been “happy in this skin” (p. 124). This level of confidence, however, does not prevent her from being judged and advised to change. Willowdean says that her mother “had me on more fad diets than I can list before I even turned eleven” (p. 90). Her mother represents the social norms of beauty that are emphasized without logic.

Throughout the history of young adult literature, body privilege has been consistently promoted, presenting fatness as associated with unhappiness or an unhealthy lifestyle. This type of novels are addressed to teenagers and they perpetuate what can be labeled ‘thin-thinking.’ This term encompasses the dominant perspective that values thinness, promotes thin privileges, and fosters fat-phobia or fat-hate. Within this worldview, thinness is seen as necessary for achieving success in life (Beal, 2022, p. 91).

Being overweight herself, Julie Murphy uses her novel to promote such positivity emphasizing that one physical quality cannot be enough to describe a person: “sometimes figuring out who you are means understanding that we are a mosaic of experiences. I’m Dumplin’. And Will and Willowdean. I’m fat. I’m happy. I’m insecure. I’m bold” (p. 366).

In contemporary society, the word "fat" has taken on a predominantly negative connotation, deviating from its original purpose as a neutral descriptor. Willowdean shows unwavering positivity in the face of her mother's expressed concerns about her "health". This positivity can largely be attributed to the influence of her late Aunt Lucy, who always supported Willowdean and never allowed her weight to define or limit her. However, since Aunt Lucy's passing at the age of 36, weighing 498 pounds, a new dynamic emerges. Willowdean finds herself compelled to understand her aunt better, using Lucy's life as inspiration for her own journey towards body-positivity. On the other hand, Willowdean's mother becomes focused on preventing her daughter from gaining extra weight while

mentioning the fate of Aunt Lucy. This creates a conflict between body-positivity and the notion of health. The tension between body-positivity and concerns about health highlights a common discourse used to undermine the acceptance and celebration of diverse body types. It raises questions about the balance between self-acceptance and societal expectations regarding health:

It [fat diets] was always a sore point between her [the mother] and Lucy. I'd hear the two of them downstairs, arguing back and forth about it long after I should have been asleep. "I want her to be healthy," my mom would retort (Murphy 91).

This inclusion of contrasting perspectives on Willowdean's weight and her aunt Lucy's life and death serves a significant purpose. It allows Willowdean's body-positivity to challenge and counter her mother's concerns about her health, revealing that the underlying issue is not truly about health but rather about finding happiness and attracting romantic partners. What Willowdean's mother fails to grasp, and what makes this novel impactful for fat teenagers, is that Willowdean is already content and has been secretly involved with a boy throughout the story, despite her weight. According to Sarah Shelton, the conventional young adult literature deem the aspects of romance and overweight incompatible until Willowdean loses few pounds. However, it is the presence of this boy that undermines Willowdean's confidence and prompts her to reassess her self-perception (2017, p. 238).

Willowdean realizes that her body-positivity and self-assurance aren't as strong as she initially believed. Once Bo enters the picture and shows interest in her as she is, Willowdean starts doubting herself. She begins comparing herself to other beautiful girls, worrying that Bo might notice her body not being "fit." These insecurities reach a tipping point when she realizes that others would question how she managed to be with someone like Bo, and it deeply affects her self-confidence. She realizes that anyone see them together would find her as "one-half of the couple who everyone stares at and asks, How did she get him?" (p. 88).

The novel shows that when it comes to love and relationships, the duality of 'worthiness' and 'worthlessness' are strongly linked to physical attraction. Will herself feels this duality as she states "I see myself in comparison to every other girl he's likely touched. With their smooth backs and trim waists" (p. 58). The duality holds that a woman is worthy of love and good partner if she is beautiful according to the social standard. If, however, a woman lacks the conventional type of beauty, she is deemed worthless. Jean Baudrillard comments on that saying today's world has put everything to evaluation making people decide "[e]ither a thing is 'worthless', or it is 'priceless'" (2003, p. 10).

In addition to feeling doubtful about her appearance, Will stumbles upon an empty registration form for the beauty pageant among her late Aunt Lucy's belongings. This discovery surprises her because it suggests that Lucy might not have viewed the pageant as foolish, and had considered participating in it. This is an idea that contradicts the lessons she had imparted to Willowdean during her childhood about the stupidity of beauty competitions. This revelation leaves Willowdean both perplexed and invigorated, prompting her to make a momentous decision that feels significant to her. "I'm entering Clover City's MissTeen Blue Bonnet Pageant," she states (p. 143).

When she goes to the pageant she notices that all the competing girls have the same body type, which shows how far these competitions are from the reality of diverse women bodies. However she affirms her decision by saying:

“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. I’m ready to go back to being the version of myself I was before Bo. I’m entering this pageant because there’s no reason I shouldn’t” (p. 154).

The introduction of Willowdean into the competition is significant to alter the unified pattern of simulacra that are exported from beauty pageant, i.e. tall, thin, and perhaps white and young. Baudrillard holds that people are now caught in a relentless pursuit of an artificial reality, driven by a desire for sameness and an inability to distinguish one thing from another. Technology as a powerful tool that generates uniform objects and identical images. It acts as a colossal extension of ourselves, a medium that influences every aspect of life. As a result, people’s current world has become a realm of imitation, where authenticity and uniqueness are lost. We find ourselves trapped in a cycle of chasing illusions, unable to discern what is real from what is fabricated (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1). Willowdean’s registration in the pageant opens the door for other unlikely candidates that follow her and register as well

The pursuit of body-positivity is an ongoing and individualized struggle, not universally attained by all individuals. It encompasses a complex journey and an intentional choice. Particularly within a society that predominantly values thinness. Willowdean actively challenges and critiques this prevailing system and its associated worldview, forging her own perspective and asserting her agency in shaping her self-image:

Maybe I thought I deserved all the same things all those other girls do. I don’t know? But I’m different from other girls, and even if I do deserve the same things they do, that doesn’t mean I’ll get them. Me getting up there and competing against them would only prove that (p. 325)

This straightforward and honest portrayal serves as a notable strength of the story. Willowdean's unambiguous fatness serves as a relatable point of connection for overweight teenagers, enabling them to readily identify with the protagonist's experiences and challenges. This is particularly significant considering the scarcity of such representations in fictional works, as compared to the prevalence of narratives featuring thin individuals. Consequently, the novel provides a sense of recognition and validation. Willowdean spreads and passes this positivity to other girls and encourage them to take the stage of competition: “these other girls ended up entering because I did. It’s like I’m supposed to be guiding them or something” (p. 181)

The romantic journey of Will also plays a significant role in the narrative progression. Early on, Willowdean's expresses her longing for someone to share affectionate moments with. This longing becomes evident when she witnesses the intimate embrace between her friend Ellen and her boyfriend Tim. Shortly thereafter, the introduction of Bo sparks Willowdean's strong infatuation with him. Remarkably, within the initial pages of the novel, Murphy establishes the representation of fat individuals as capable of experiencing and

expressing sexuality and romance (Beal, 2022, p. 98). This challenges the prevalent stereotype that fat bodies are inherently devoid of sexual capacity or rights.

Baudrillard asserts that the separation between the body as organic entity and body as an image exported through Medea has led to complexities in intimate relationships. The body has become a means of seduction, especially the female body. Thus making the body thin and within the standards has become desirable because it is both attractive and seductive. Baudrillard states that the realm of seduction presents a striking contrast to the realm of production. Rather than focusing on creating and manufacturing objects for their inherent value, seduction involves diverting them from their conventional worth and reality. The goal is to direct them towards the realm of appearances and symbolic exchange. This shift emphasizes the importance of superficial qualities and the manipulation of perception, rather than the intrinsic value or purpose of the objects themselves (2003, p. 21).

In one of the most famous celebrations in America, Halloween, kids and teenagers feel excited to wear exotic uniforms except for Will. She expresses different opinion from her other thin peers:

El loves Halloween and drags me to a different party every year. But, as a kid, I never fit into the costumes and was always left with whatever we could scour from my mom's and Lucy's closets. *I guess the magic of being someone else is lost when you can never quite shed your own skin.* [...] I mean, fat kids have enough problems finding clothes (p. 121 *emphasis added*).

Numerous news reports assert that body image concerns have a profound impact on individuals' mental health, potentially leading to depression and even suicide. It has been observed that suicide notes often indicate that individuals resort to extreme measures due to the negative effects of body shaming, making them feel like victims. Being fat is not normalized rather it is condemned and neglected due to the prevalence of modeled bodies in the Medea. In a survey, "The Mental Health Foundation polled 4,505 adults in March and revealed that one in eight (13 per cent) of them had considered taking their own lives because of concerns relating to body image" (Petter, 2019). According to researcher Chandana and Sheeba, Research findings indicate that adolescents who perceive themselves as either overweight or underweight are at an increased risk of suicidal ideation and attempts. The study reveals that teenagers who fall into these categories show a slightly higher likelihood of experiencing suicidal tendencies compared to their peers with average body weight. These conclusions were drawn from self-reported height and weight data provided by the teens, which were utilized to determine their actual body size (2023, p. 224).

One of the strengths of the novel is that Willowdean, like any teenager, experiences moments of self-doubt despite her initial confidence. Will takes up a courageous move into challenging the simulacra of beauty that surrounds her. However, she is amazed how in beauty competitions they show contestant wearing swimsuits and judge their bodies before they judge their achievements. She notes "ridiculous it is that swimsuit accounts for more than talent" (p. 304). Will makes another point when she watches the video of previous competitors for the pageant, they are all unified in one body type. The same body type that

overwhelms the beauty industry, “[t]he more contestants that grace the screen, the more obvious it is how much we do not fit. [...] It makes me feel small, like a blip on the history of this little pageant.” (p. 304). As if the Medea has unified all the differences among women into one image and sold it as real. The modern “[t]echnology [...] is very absorbent of people to the extent that everyone has the same recollections based on the media” (Amir & Hussain, 2018, p. 671)

Willowdean emerges as a powerful advocate for individuals who don't conform to societal norms, inspiring them to participate in the pageant. The author, Murphy, recognizes self-acceptance as a potent tool to challenge society's notion of the perfect body image (Chandana & Sheeba, 2023, p. 223). After being hesitant to wear a swimsuit on her overweight body, Willowdean finally asserts that a swimsuit body is a body with a swimsuit, no more or less. Through *Dumplin'*, the author aims to combat the prevailing stereotypes associated with plus-sized individuals. Willowdean boldly declares that everybody type is worthy of celebration and wearing all sorts of clothes, "There's something about swimsuits that make you think you've got to earn the right to wear them. And that's wrong. Really, the criteria is simple. Do you have a body? Put a swimsuit on it" (p. 359).

Jean Baudrillard emphasizes a similar idea as he states that in contemporary society, the perception of women is primarily based on their outward appearance. This emphasis on feminine appearance undermines the recognition of their inner depth and complexity. By reevaluating the prevailing narratives surrounding femininity and embracing the interplay between appearance and depth, women can reclaim and leverage their authentic power, “for here lies the secret of their strength” (Baudrillard, 1991, p. 10).

But that can't be true. No matter how much I tell myself that the fat and the stretch marks don't matter, they do. Even if Bo, for whatever reason, doesn't care, I do. Then there are days when I really give zero flying [...care], and I am totally satisfied with this body of mine. How can I be both of those people at once? (p. 174)

In this instance, Will is confused between her confidence and her physical insecurity. She does not realize why she cannot stop worrying about her flaws despite the fact that she does not care about having them. Baudrillard asserts that in addition to the value placed on material goods, there are also moral and aesthetic values that function based on a clear distinction between what is considered good or bad, and between what is deemed beautiful or ugly. However, it clearly becomes challenging to perceive things as they are. Instead, people understand things and realities based on the social value attributed to them (Baudrillard, 2003, pp. 9-10).

The novel features multiple characters who are fat, each navigating their body size and their interactions with the world in different manners, with varying degrees of achievement. Aunt Lucy serves as more than a mere cautionary example or a stereotypical fat individual; instead, she becomes a source of inspiration for Willowdean on her journey. Another character, Millie Michalchuck, Will's overweight friend, decides to participate in the beauty pageant upon learning about Willowdean's involvement. Millie demonstrates that her weight contributes to her charismatic personality and that she does not require Will's

protection. It is Millie who embraces the pageant, showing a positive attitude towards her own body, making Will remarks while watching her “[t]hat cute, little fat girl is a beauty queen” (p. 360). The change in Millie’s confidence is brought about by Willowdean’s first courageous decision. In fact it is noticeable that “[t]he premise that identity formation is never complete and ongoing is also emphasised by scholars and writers, including Manfred Jurgensen, Homi K. Bhabha and Stuart Hall, in their exploration of cultural identity” (Az-Zubaidy, 2019, p. 1205).

Will’s beliefs run contrary to what her surrounding perceive. People believe that they have the right to judge and categorize bodies because they are trained to do this through the Medea and endless advertisements. According to Baudrillard, in the realm of cinema, photography, and modern mass media, there is a highly evolved and advanced phenomenon wherein the original object or image loses its essence. Instead, everything is created with the intention of infinite replication. This reflects how people’s perception of the body has transformed, reducing it to nothing more than a medium for conveying messages and storing information. The body becomes a resource for data processing, devoid of its inherent value or significance (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 101). However, the novel shows that when people gain enough awareness of this Medea malice they can put an end to it as Will and her friends do:-

Hannah: Maybe fat girls or girls with limps or girls with big teeth don’t usually win beauty pageants. Maybe that’s not the norm. But the only way to change that is to be present. We can’t expect the same things these other girls do until we demand it (p. 325).

According to Jean Baudrillard, the final phase of dealing with one’s own body is the process of realizing and embracing it without all the values and images attached to it. Following the initial desire to observe oneself through mirrors or photographs, there emerges a longing to move beyond mere observation. This longing includes the ability to orbit around one’s own existence, and ultimately to transcend the boundaries of one’s physical form. However, this progression signifies a shift away from the appreciation of aesthetics and instead emphasizes the dominance of the body itself (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 106). Willowdean reaches this state towards the end of the novel as she gets her mother to appreciate her participation and walks out of the stage in her long red dress:

I walk the three blocks in my dress and heels. I love this dress. I want to always look at it, hanging in my closet, *and remember this night in November when I stepped into my own light*. Wind pushes against me, sending the fabric in ripples as I move down the streets of my little town (p. 371 *emphasis added*).

Like many other novels aimed at this particular audience, the main character achieves success through self-esteem and relationships built on compassion and admiration. Willowdean not only has a conventionally attractive thin best friend, but also a group of other friends who are diverse in body size, have specific challenges like therapeutic shoes or dental issues, and stand by her side. Additionally, *Dumplin’* effectively demonstrates to readers that all individuals, including those who may appear confident, also grapple with insecurities and inner conflicts as they strive to find their own inherent worth (Hart, 2019).

Conclusion

Dumplin' is a powerful example of fighting back against oppressive beauty standards. Through the narrative of Willowdean Dickson, the novel emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance and body positivity. The novel proves that the simulacra of thin bodies that the Medea exports is not the only image of beauty. Willowdean inspires others to embrace their bodies and identities without shame or apology. In doing so, the novel serves as a call to action against the damaging effects of hyperreal beauty standards which dominate people in today's culture.

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