

Deconstruction of Women's Beauty Standard on Social Media: An Analysis

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Abstract: Women and beauty are identical entities. Beauty is considered a feminine trait and becomes a necessity that has been deeply rooted in the wider social system and is culturally indoctrinated, and has even become a trend on social media. Every day, women are haunted and convinced by the standardization of beauty, which increasingly plunges women into the praise of beauty. This also makes many social media accounts that take a lot of interest and profit by creating Instagram accounts that contain photos of beautiful women. This research highlights the deconstruction of women's beauty standards on social media, and how whether the post is an act of exploitation against women. A thorough qualitative method is used to examine social media especially Instagram which displays many photos of beautiful females. This study shows, first, the female beauty standard in social media mostly concerning beautiful and fashionable women. Second, the post on Instagram is an act of exploitation of women and is more concerned only with women's beauty rather than women's achievement.

Keywords: Beauty standard, exploitation, women's achievements.

Introduction

The concept of female beauty has always been a topic of discussion and a separate trend in society. The beauty of very diverse women is not limited to facial beauty, but also the beauty of skin color, body, hair, and others. Even the beauty of women that is often invisible is beauty that comes from within the soul of the woman herself (inner beauty). The difference in the meaning of each person to the concept of beauty has resulted in the emergence of various cultural and media studies in the academic realm (Anastasia, 2006). These various views are the impact of the dynamics of life that continues to change and develop in society. Along with the rapid development of digital technology, the concept of women's beauty is produced and reproduced through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram which displays various images or images of women who are considered beautiful.

One example of the application of standards and the concept of beauty in Instagram can be seen through an account with the name @uinkhas Cantik. Account @uinkhas Cantik which has 3450 followers. This account contains a collection of photos of students at the KH State Islamic University. Ahmad Siddiq Jember. An account managed by the Admin selects and selects student photos that have certain beauty criteria by uploading photos to the Instagram feed. Photos that have been selected through the selection process, will be displayed with the name, faculty, study program, year, and hashtag (#uinkhascantik). Similar accounts are also found in various universities including @ugmcantik, @ui.cantik, @uns.cantik, @ums.cantik, @anakipbcantik and there are many more similar accounts.

The beauty displayed through several photos on Instagram accounts such as @uinkhas Cantik uses certain standard criteria including feminine

women with white skin, fashion-able, using make-up, slim, modern. If observed, before carrying out the photo selection process, the admin @uinkhascantik will search for photos of UIN Khas Jember students with the hashtag #uinkhascantik or get recommendations from other users. This next process is to determine which photos are eligible to be displayed so that they are considered to meet the previously established beauty standards. The selected photo then received thousands of likes and comments from followers @uinkhascantik. Even the students themselves took pictures and posted on their own Instagram and then tagged Instagram @uinkhascantik. This shows that they want to be reposted on Instagram @uinkhascantik, and they want to be recognized as beautiful students according to the standards of the @uinkhascantik account. From this background, beauty becomes interesting to look at critically using the perspective of cultural studies to see power relations, body autonomy, and cultural influences in social media.

Research Method

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. Using paradigms and critically analyzing with the study of deconstruction and semiotics. This research will be mainly concerned with the critical examination of materials derived from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include social media accounts that have beautiful female usernames. Through semiotics, there are symbols and signs seen from social media that display beautiful women based on their standards. While secondary sources in the form of textbooks, journal articles, seminar papers, newspapers, and data from supporting documents that are relevant to the research topic are then analyzed descriptively.

Results and Discussion

Deconstruction of Women Beauty Standard on Social Media

In his book entitled *Grammatology* (1976) quoted from Pradoko (2017), Derrida introduces

deconstruction theory that rejects structuralism based on logo centrism to reveal a reality which one thing as the central and single element to neglect other elements. Another concept introduced by Derrida (1968) is Difference quoted from Muslimin (2019) generally, difference means to differentiate and to delay. He explains the term "different" with "differEnce" and "differAnce" which means to differ (differentiate) and to difer (delay).

Derrida's theory emphasizes the critical way to understand the meaning of a text or context from different ways as well as present assumptions behind the text or context. This theory suggests the deconstructor to analyze the relationship of contradiction and opposition from a text or context to form a new construction which is in line with the statement of Rohman (2014) that deconstruction is new construction as the solution from the inconsistencies from the old construction.

The deconstruction of women's beauty standards can be seen from the evolution of women's beauty standards in Indonesia which the new beauty standard construction deconstructed the old beauty standard. The ideal beauty standard in 1960-1970 was thin, brown skin and wavy hair. In the 1980 era, the ideal beauty standard was smooth and soft skin. Then in the 1990 era, the ideal beauty standard was more complex and complicated. There were more criteria such as ideal body was not a thin body anymore but a curvy body which was not too thin but not too fat. Good skin was not only smooth and soft skin but also fair and bright skin (Bender, 2021).

The deconstruction of women's beauty standards appears from time to time, it's like the exotic skin represented with brown skin that used to be popular among girls in the 1960 era was deconstructed with the ideal skin color and tone with yellow and bright skin. The deconstruction also appears on body shape, from the thin body to be the curvy body that is not too thin but not too fat. The interpretation of skin color and body shape change the beauty standard on society which gets the influence from media.

The deconstruction of women's beauty standards emerges through the trend on traditional media mass. Like in 1960-1990 the mainstream

media such as television, magazine, and newspaper are to be the trend maker, then in 2000 era was shifted to social media. Social media is widely used by society from different backgrounds, thus it plays a big role to construct new beauty standards.

Unlike traditional media mass, social media provides wide options and can be used by all people around the world. Several options provided by social media that are not provided by traditional media, namely: 1) users not only limited to models and celebrities, 2) users mostly only show the best version of themselves (mostly in physical aspects) like uploading the most attractive photo, 3) generally, users interact with their closest people like family, friends, and peers on social media, 4) social media provides the wide range of features like comment, share and like sections (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

The wide options provided by social media give many chances for people to be the trend maker and the chance to be popular. Nowadays, celebrities are not only limited to who appear on television but also the trend maker on social media which is usually called *selebgram*, *selebtok*, etc. To be popular on social media and become social media celebrities, they should have a high number of followers, likes, and repost. They should campaign a specific and interesting message on social media or follow the challenge from the viral trend to be popular. The fast news spread on social media makes something easy to be viral that usually inspires the follower to do the viral challenge or popular trend. Therefore, the dynamic change on social media can influence the deconstruction of women's beauty standards.

The high exposure of social media from users' favorite influencers, peers, and followers influences the users to expect unrealistic body imagery. They have a high expectation of body imagery cause people only post the most attractive photo or video. To have an attractive photo or video, the users do many efforts like putting on make-up, diet, buying new clothes, even plastic surgery to fulfill social expectations which indirectly decrease body positivity and self-acceptance. With the high exposure of social media, it can make the users

have body concerns and body dissatisfaction (Ando et al. 2021).

Social media makes the users compare their physical appearance with their peers or favorite influencers which only creates unrealistic expectations. Even though, the users know that their peers or favorite influencers have edited or filtered the picture to get the most attractive one which can be far from the real condition, they still do the same thing to fulfill their expectations. Many social media celebrities promote different types of beauty which can change absolute beauty standards but sadly only mainstream and popular beauty standards are followed by social media users. Eventually, it deconstructs new beauty standards and does not make beauty become a relative perception. It can make the user has low body positivity and only focus on their physical appearance and ignore other achievements to fulfill the mainstream beauty standards on social media which can harm the users. It is in line with the result of the research conducted by Tallat N et al. (2017) that body dissatisfaction brings negative impacts on students' academic achievement. The students who satisfy with their appearance tend to have a higher grade. Although the dynamic beauty standards on social media can promote beauty positivity and construct many beauty standards, most of the followers still follow the mainstream beauty standard.

The Exploitation of Women in Social Media

The beautiful student accounts mostly belong to every university in Indonesia. They posted many photos that have been selected by their own standard of beauty. The photo posted gets several responds such as like and comments. Along with it, the beautiful student accounts attract number of follower and increase number of like and comment. The number of followers gives them profit by paid promotion services and endorsements.

The situation seen as an opportunity and they continue to selected students' photo and post it frequently. These phenomena clearly put women as an object of visualization to gain a profit. According to the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1797), objectification the process of lowering a

person value as a human being to the status of an object. Along with social phenomena, self-objectification turns into self-surveillance, causing psychological consequences and mental health risks. According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), the cultural practice of objectification leads to self-objectification. Self-Objectification refers to the process that women internalize and accept the beliefs that society constructed (Mckay, 2013).

Feminist theory argues that the disclosure of visual experiences faced by women has led them to internalize visual objectification and change themselves. That is, women see and treat themselves as objects to be evaluated based on their appearance (Hermawan & Hamzah, 2017). As an object, the photos in the account of this beautiful student motivated women to be perfectly beautiful as social media constructed. And the validation is approved when they photo posted by those kind of accounts.

Festinger (1954) suggested that humans are believed to have an innate drive to compare themselves with other individuals. This action has several purposes including self-evaluation, making decisions in behavior based on their social environment, and modifying cognition to increase self-esteem. In doing a comparison, there are two possible scenarios, the first is an upward comparison and the second is a downward comparison. The upward direction of social comparison occurs when a person compares himself to others who are better. The downward comparison occurs when a person compares himself to someone who is worse (Reategui & Palmer, 2017).

These two directions of comparison have different contrasting effects. If the comparison is upward then this will trigger negative emotions, such as envy, body-dissatisfaction, or frustration. Meanwhile, if the comparison is downward, then this will trigger positive emotions, such as relief or satisfaction. This also applies to women in using social media.

Social media has succeeded in shifting beauty standards from time to time. As the social media user, women triggered to compare themselves with others continuously. The more women use the social media, the more the more often they

compare themselves to others on social media. Moreover, physical appearance plays an important role in social media. In addition, being posted by the beautiful student account is such as a validation that they were beautiful. But otherwise, not being posted in those kind of account will resulted body-dissatisfaction.

Body modification refers to the deliberate or permanent altering of an individual's human anatomy or appearance (Henriques & Patnaik, 2016). Body dissatisfaction caused several negative impacts such as eating disorders. Women who experienced this symptom to women who are trying to change their appearance in order to have a slim body as portrayed in social media beauty standard (Natasya et al. 2021). The body-dissatisfaction triggered women to have a perfect body and appearance as the social media standard. They will not even hesitate to make body modifications, both full and partial body modifications.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) find that self-objectification also lead to depression and eating disorders. Women strive to change their body and appearance through fashion, exercise, diet, beauty products, and even worse surgery and eating disorders (Mckay, 2013). Besides, since they do not look perfectly beautiful, women tend to avoid meeting friends, going to school or work, dating and another social activity. And lastly, the will not enjoying their life and it will lead to a depression or even worse a self-harming.

The need to be perfectly beautiful seen as an opportunity by capitalist. Capitalist come to fulfill their need by offering many kind of treatments or skin care. They realizes that women mostly dissatisfy with their own body and women strive to achieve the validation if beauty as the beauty standard in social media.

The treatments were focused on the beauty standard nowadays such as a fair skin, slim body etc. The treatments offered are in the form of white injections, white infusions, skin lightening supplements and others. While some plastic surgeries are also offered such as jaw shaping surgery, lip fillers, breast implants and others. Because entrepreneurs realize that anything women will do to get a body that matches beauty

standards on social media, they don't even hesitate to provide treatments or beauty products that are harmful to health. All the impacts explained, women who are the most suffer by this condition. They suffer a psychological impact and also the physical impact.

Subordination of Women's Achievements

The construction of beauty is something that is not universal. Beauty that develops in society forms the view that beauty is part of female femininity. Physical appearance such as body, face, eyebrows, eyes, hair, to the attributes used by women, such as clothes, is very important to determine the level of women's beauty. The concept of beauty is not something natural or taken for granted, but a socio-cultural construction. Media texts carry out the form of image production and reproduction continuously, as well as beauty. Women will be said to be beautiful not only based on white, smooth, toned, young skin. But also highlight certain body parts such as the chest, hips, lips, eyes, and everything related to disciplining women's bodies with the standards of society itself.

The single positivistic way of thinking about beauty standards often leads to oppression (Amin, 2015). This oppression is often not realized by many women. For example, many women are not treated properly just because they are not considered beautiful based on the beauty standards created by social media, even though in terms of their abilities, these women have qualities and capabilities that meet the established work standards. In Indonesia today, even the standard of beauty used is to make the beauty of Caucasians from the west or Korea the benchmark for beauty, for example, it can be seen from several soap operas and advertisements on TV that most of the artists who play soap operas/films/advertisements are mostly foreign-born artists. This country, which has the characteristics of white skin, sharp nose, sharp eyes, tall and slender, etc., and of course this is very far from the posture and beauty of a native Indonesian. On the other hand, artists who are naturally beautiful with Indonesian characteristics are much more qualified. In other cases, women are always seen more from their physical appearance than their achievements. For example,

from some news, it is stated "Besides Beautiful, These 5 Indonesian Women Have Achievements". In the news narrative, it is clear that the main focus is beauty as if to say that beauty is more important than achievement, and if it is not beautiful, existence will not be seen.

Oppression in the context of beauty is different from the concept of oppression in the Marxist-orthodox view that occurs in the factories of the proletariat whose surplus value is being exploited by the bourgeoisie. Marx's economic deterministic analysis was later criticized by neo-Marxist figures, (Suseno, 2013) one of which was Gramsci who proposed a cultural view with the same prophetic characteristics as the goals of Marxism, but he formulated his ideas into alternative and more complex ideas. (Mahadika, 2021) The concept of beauty, which is constructed by mass culture and media, is reproduced continuously so that it is considered a natural thing, something that does not need to be critically questioned as a form of hegemony. Hegemony allows people to accept oppression as a natural thing and even feel happy and accept it as it is. According to Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is the power that occurs which is the chains of victories obtained through a consensus mechanism rather than through violence or oppression of other social classes. (Siswati, 2018) Efforts to lead people to assess and view social problems by winning consensus are to determine directly or indirectly the cognitive (ideational) structures of society through hegemonic products that are seen as morally and intellectually correct so that the dominance of compromise ideas occurs naturally and is not questioned again.

Women who accept and follow these beauty standards, then try to change their physical appearance to meet the beauty criteria in society. For example, using various kinds of beauty cosmetics, managing the body by dieting, to doing plastic surgery are some of the efforts made by women who experience hegemony or in a term as symbolic violence (Fatmawati, 2020). To achieve beauty, a lot of effort must be made. How women judge their bodies will usually be closely related to how the social and cultural environment outside of themselves judges women's bodies. This means that women will always try to adjust their body

shape to what social and cultural words say about the concept of beauty itself. Unconsciously, accept commercial messages as truth rather than a construction. Capitalism plays a big role in convincing women that today's ideal body is more desirable and achievable. And the industries engaged in the beauty sector are growing rapidly (Fahimah, 2017).

Women will always try to adjust their body shape to what social and cultural words say about the concept of beauty itself. Unconsciously, accept commercial messages as truth rather than a construction. Capitalism plays a big role in convincing women that today's ideal body is more desirable and achievable. (Laendra & Vardiansyah, 2017) And the industries engaged in the beauty sector are growing rapidly. The beauty standards are constructions, which change from time to time are a form of reaction to social, economic, and political conditions. This is seen by the capitalists, where the capitalists want to perpetuate these standards by creating beauty products for women. (Synott, 2007) By creating these products, the capitalists establish their beauty standards to support their products. According to Louis Althusser, it is not only a framework of ideas but also material practices, where ideology is brought together with daily practice or behavior in society. (Storey, 2009) Beauty myths are constructed through various discursive exposures to advertising media, books, films, and so on.

Conclusion

Discussions related to beauty standards are often packaged with contempt for one's body or are often known as body shaming. There are no specific rules of beauty standards around women. All women have their beauty standards. Women will look beautiful when they believe that they are beautiful when they are confident with everything in their bodies. Women who believe in the existence of beauty standards, then think that they do not meet the standards, so that their confidence is lost, then at that time women have lost their identity.

Deconstruction destroys dichotomous binary oppositions and gives rise to new meanings that go beyond established concepts. Appearance is not a standard of beauty that produces domination and being dominated but treats it as a fully human subject, not as an object. Beauty in the end is not seen from mere physical criteria, nor is it compared with the opposite meaning. The concept of beauty will have a new meaning based on the context and dynamics of interpretation more freely and freely. The practice of meaning is a form of counter-hegemony. Women's beauty goes beyond the established criteria of physical form as embraced by modernism, but beauty is seen as an attitude and behavior, accepting, caring, honest, which upholds the emancipation of fellow human beings.

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