

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The phenomenon of LGBT inflicts pros and cons on society. Sexual orientation deviations, which are now prevalent within the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community, are phenomena that have always occurred in every society in recent years (Ardi et al., 2017). According to the American Psychological Association (2015), transgender is a term used to describe a person's gender identification that may not always match their given sex at birth; it includes MTF (male-to-female) persons who are often referred to as transgender women or trans women. On one side, those who agree with the existence of LGBTQ expect its existence as a part of human rights. On the other side, those who disagree believe that LGBT deviates from social norms (Tisa, 2018). It causes increasing HIV-AIDS transmission through sexual contact and against religious values (Darmoko, 2018).

In pro and con situations, problems regarding LGBTQ still arise. Several countries still think LGBT negatively. For instance, The Indonesian Psychiatrists Association (PDSKJI) has classified homosexuality, bisexuality, and transsexualism as mental disorders, which can be cured through proper treatment. The statement against the World Health Organization (WHO), which on May 17, 1990, removed homosexuality from its list of psychiatric disorders (Yosephine, 2016). Following it, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) did the same way in 1973, strengthening public opinion for LGBT (Turner, 2017). In contrast,

some countries consider LGBT to be expected, whereas 23 countries have legalized same-sex marriage (Darmoko, 2018). From the Netherlands as the first country to ratify in 2001 to the United States in 2015, and keep growing with three new countries, Austria (start on January 1, 2019), Taiwan (begin on May 24, 2019), and Costa Rica (begin on February 8, 2020) (Darmoko, 2018). The other thing appears to discuss the appearance of trans women. If their appearance looks feminine, they are assumed to be a parody, yet if they do not look like women, they might think they do not try their best to become 'women' (Burns, 2018). When trans women adapt to heteronormative gender expressions of femininity, they may lose male social control and privilege, forcing them to reestablish their social power by appearance (e.g., enhanced body surveillance, appearance comparison) (Strübel et al., 2020). These things are some situations that will be faced once they decide to be trans women.

In addition, according to Strübel et al. (2020), trans men and trans women scored slightly higher on body shaming than cisgender men and women. Trans women may experience body shame and depressive symptoms when comparing their appearance to societal stereotypes of female attractiveness because their bodies do not confirm their authentic self (i.e., gender identity) or fit societal expectations of femininity (Strübel et al., 2020). Valuing/internalizing muscularity as an ideal may relieve some of the pressure on trans women to look feminine, while valuing thinness may intensify the pressure on trans women to "pass" as feminine, leading to appearance contrast, body envy, and, eventually, increased depressive symptoms (Strübel et al., 2020).

Talking about the appearance of trans women in a beauty pageant will lead to discussing the standard of beauty among trans women. Miss International Queen is a beauty pageant whose contestants are trans women. The beauty pageant was first held in 2004. Miss International Queen is claimed as the most prominent beauty pageant for transgender in the world by *This Is Life with Lisa Ling*, a CNN original American documentary television film, broadcast on November 26, 2017 (www.CNN.com). As the prestigious beauty pageant for transgender, its contestant comes from worldwide. Grand Final Miss International Queen is held annually in Pattaya, Thailand. Grand Final Miss International Queen 2020 is the newest event in this beauty pageant. Grand Final Miss International Queen 2020 divides the competition into sessions like other beauty pageants. First, National Costume; the contestants wear a costume related to their culture or country heritage. Second is the Evening gown; the contestants will show their femininity through dress and catwalk. Third, Swimsuit competition; the contestants wear swimming suits while exposing their bodies to be judged. The Miss International Queen comes to be a platform to voice transgender rights. It offers the contestants the opportunity to compete and show their talent and beauty. This beauty pageant aims to create equality and transgender acceptance in society (www.missinternationalqueen.com).

The beauty pageant is a product of media as a cultural institution, socializing women to beauty stereotypes that reflect feminine beauty schemas (Lynch, 2007). According to Freedman (1986), as cited in Lynch (2007), women compete in beauty pageants with makeup, high heels, evening gown, and

swimming suits as they stroll down a runway to be judged by others. A beauty pageant is usually linked with beauty standards. Even though each beauty pageants have their own criteria to choose the winner, the concept of "beautiful" in the capacity of physical appearance is actually the first charm to be judged (Pratiwi, 2018). Ones who join the beauty pageants considered can fill in the criteria of beauty. For years, these are the criteria of beauty: it demanded a slim build with an ample bosom and a tiny waist, the jawline had to be defined, the cheekbones had to be high and sharp, the nose is pointed, the lips are complete, and the eyes should be broad, light, and preferably blue or green (Givhan & Morales 2020). Hair should be extended, dark, flowing, and preferably golden (Givhan & Morales 2020).

According to Wolf (2002), beauty is an obsession with physical perfection. Ones considered attractive should have a face without pores, no flaws, symmetry face, a tall body, thin like fashion models, white skin, blonde hair, and no aging marks like wrinkles. In contrast, unattractive is depicted as a dark face, black or pale lips, thin eyebrows, and an ideal face (Ambarwati, 2018). Meanwhile, "beautiful is good" is a bias that reflects people's idea that a person's attractiveness will reflect the person's inner characteristics and result in a more positive feeling (Frederick et al., 2015). For trans women, the female beauty standards in society can be said to be a dangerous thing in which having the "perfect" balance of feminine and masculine in our presence to comply with society's impossibly limited standards in a way that gives us protection in passing as our actual genders is a never-ending juggling act, and the line is relatively thin (Burns, 2018).

Finding one's sense of self during an infinite list of social demands can be difficult for trans women, as it is for any woman. They would be too tall, too broad-shouldered, or not white enough if they were not "too trans". The core characteristic of patriarchy is the deprivation of women's agency in developing a sense of dignity unrelated to how much her beauty appeals to men's sexual needs, and it extends to trans women even though they never transform at all (Burns, 2018).

Thailand is well known as a friendly country for LGBTQ in Asia. Its major cities are hotspots where people can find LGBTQ, and there is no judgment to be who they are (Mancino, 2019). The other reason is that the country offers sex reassignment surgery services. There are several reasons to undergo surgery in Thailand: First, Thailand has modern equipment, instruments, and expert surgeons. Second, the cost of surgery is cheaper than in other countries. Third, Thailand is a convenient country to visit. Thailand could achieve this by providing the correct information and developing marketing strategies for its target (Rawikul & Lattipongpun, 2020). **กะเทย** (*Kathoey*) is a term to mention a person who was born male but has a feminine appearance, behavior, and expression with a female. In historical meaning, it refers to "hermaphrodite," which used to mean either a male to female or female to male (Suriyasarn, 2014). It is used exclusively for male-female transgender/transvestite/transsexual persons in the current time (Suriyasarn, 2014). Pattaya is regarded as the center of *Kathoy* culture. The majority of society converting Buddhism influences the growth of *Kathoy* in Thailand. Buddhism wields considerable importance in this country, where the

three pillars of Thai identity are the concepts of nation, religion, and monarchy (Barea, 2011). The religion is well-known for its underlying tolerance, and this concept influences Thailand's approach regarding gender expression (Mancino, 2019). Another, many feel that the unique kingdom's life philosophy - 'Sanuk Sabai' – is what genuinely motivates its acceptance of most things. (IN magazine, 2020). In Thailand, *kathoe*y is considered to be the third gender category (Käng, 2012).

There are several beauty pageants in Thailand, but the most famous beauty pageants for trans women are Miss Tiffany and Miss International Queen. Both of the beauty pageants are look-alike women beauty pageants. They are judged based on their physical appearances and overall performance concerning the feminine ideal. Although Miss Tiffany and Miss International Queen come from Thailand, they have different targets for contestants. Miss Tiffany only accepts Thai trans women (*kathoe*y) for its contestants, while Miss International Queen has a more prominent target; it comes from worldwide.

Even though transgender people have beauty pageants for their community, some still try to compete with real women in general beauty pageants. The presence of a trans woman in a general beauty pageant brings in the pros and cons. One viewpoint argues that it is unfair to include transgender in a female beauty pageant. An analogy for its competition can be found in sports competition through sex segregation based on physical appearance (Bialystok, 2016). The inclusion of a trans woman in a beauty pageant is based on complicated perceptions about the relationship between sex and gender, the goals of beauty

pageants, and the ethics of competition (Bialystok, 2016). For example, in Miss Universe 2018, a contestant from Spain, Angela Ponce, was the first trans woman to join the competition (Kumparan.com, 2018). *Miss Universe* is an international beauty pageant held annually every year. It attracts more than 89 contestants from different countries and airs more than 190 worldwide (Carvajal et al., 2016). Ponce's journey to be a Miss Universe contestant was not easy, and she had to go through many obstacles. "I do not have to be a winner, and I just want to be here"- Angela Ponce. She proves that transgender deserves to be there (CNNIndonesia.com, 2018). In 2012, Miss Universe Organization changed its regulation in response to legal action from Jenna Talackova, a trans woman barred from Miss Universe Canada 2012 (Stern, 2018).

The issue of trans women's appearance, especially their beauty, has been standing up until now. Strengthening this object, Grand Final Miss International Queen 2020, is discussed in the study. Meanwhile, Miss International Queen is a beauty pageant where trans women compete to show their attractiveness. Further, the trans women who join the beauty pageant come from different countries with different races, colors, and physical appearances.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background that explains trans women and beauty pageants in the last part, this study aims to answer the following question:

1. How is beauty represented in the Grand Final Miss International Queen 2020?

2. Based on the beauty portrayed by the contestants, what does Miss International Queen as a transgender beauty pageant signify?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Following the statement of the problem, this objective of the study will answer the questions. The research will reveal how beauty standards are portrayed by trans women in the Grand Final Miss International Queen 2020 and know the signification of Miss International Queen as a transgender beauty pageant.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Miss International Queen is a platform for trans women to show their existence, despite it being hard to be accepted by people. Moreover, it is a beauty pageant that always relates to the beauty standard. This study proposes to know the representation of the beauty standard by contestants of Miss International Queen 2020 using the beauty myth by Naomi Wolf. Thus, analyzing the Grand Final Miss International Queen, 2020 will increase people's awareness of beauty standards on trans women, especially their physical appearance. This issue is essential because it is often overlooked due to the trans woman position in the grey area, and their existence is still regarded as taboo.

Although many kinds of research discuss transgender and beauty standards, the writer hopes to gain her knowledge by writing this research. Meanwhile, the study is expected to give an insight to the reader and other researchers who focus on similar issues or objects about trans women and beauty standards. Furthermore, the research is also expected to be helpful in particular cultural studies research,

especially those who apply beauty myth theory in the English Department, Faculty Humanities, Universitas Airlangga.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Beauty Standards:	beauty practice of femininity to get the ideal images of womanhood constructed by media and society (Foo, 2010).
Beauty Pageant:	an event to produce a queen representing cultural, racial, and gender during her reign (King-O'Riain, 2007).
Beauty Myth:	the beauty myth is created artificially to make women from generations against each other, whether consciously or not (Wolf, 2002).
Semiotics:	a study of signs which involves both theory and analysis of signs, codes, and signifying practices (Chandler, 2018).
Miss International Queen:	an international transsexual beauty pageant held annually in Pattaya, Thailand (Wuen, 2007).