

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Body appearance is an important part for individual's identity, men and women, for its functions to create impressions to the surrounding. In many ways, women socially always been constructed to be beautiful based on two factors: physical and behavioral. Therefore, many women experienced pressure from the society to achieve a standard of ideal body (Cash and Smolak 2011, 208). The standards of ideal body for woman are always defined as "thin, tall, white, and blond, a face without pores, asymmetry, or flaws" (Wolf 2002). For some women, they often feel dissatisfied with their body and try to lose their weight in order to achieve the "ideal" standard. Women are willing to do any means necessary in order to meet this ideal of perfect body even if that means starving themselves and following strict diet (Cash and Smolak 2011, 291).

Since an early age, the girls always see the endless idea of women's physical beauty and lead them to think that beauty is precious for women (Singh and Young 1995). They are dictated to believe that they must pursue and achieve beauty in their life as the most important thing. Then, as they reach their adulthood, they learn that their bodies are something to trade and their appearance influences their life experience (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 177). The women taught that they must maintain their body's size, eating healthy, diet, and do work

out. They learnt that their worth and success is determined by physical appearance (Bordo 1993). They are valued daily on their appearance, mainly about their body size. The women realize that thinness is essential thing to be appreciated and equated to societal meaning (Bordo 1993). The women come to learn that if they have fat body, they will be associated with lazy, inadequate, and out of control (Farrell 2011). This stereotype creates phenomenon that is plus-size women often find difficulty to contribute and be accepted in society.

In the daily life, there are a lot of stigmas perceived by plus-size women. The stigma attached to plus-size women is undesirable and look as negative attributes because they do not fit with the contemporary representation of beauty (AA 2014). The plus-size women also often experience the discrimination in daily life and work life. As reported by the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, from their survey of 11 women in Salvador, Brazil, who have overweight body, they often experience discrimination in their daily life (Palmeira 2019). As the example in public transport, they suffered disrespect and hostility by employees and other passengers, as illustrated by the statement:

“In the bus, you cannot pass the turnstile ... get it? Then the driver and the collector sometimes laugh at you, they don't want to open the middle or back doors so I can get in. This is all a kind of discrimination” (Palmeira 2019)

Discrimination was also constantly perceived in the working place. The participants of this research also experience unequal opportunity in work life

because of their body size. They often hear some rejection because they “couldn’t be on the board because the profile company wanted was not a fat person. The company didn’t give them the work, even though company liked their resume and everything, but because they were overweight, because they were chubby, they were not in the company profile” (Palmeira 2019).

The portrayal of plus-size women in the mass media also contributes to shape the stigma in society. In our everyday life, we often see in most of the advertisements, media always compares the figure of thin women and plus-size women. The thin women are always portrayed as attractive, friendly, success, and likeable. Meanwhile, the mass media often displays plus-size women as undesirable, unfriendly, and unattractive. This phenomenon is not only appearing in the media but also in some industries. In the apparel industry, many companies do not provide big size clothes for the plus-size women. According to the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development research, one of their participants said that when she “arrived at a store to buy an outfit on the exposed mannequin, and then asked the saleswoman if she had size XL. She looked at me and said “No, we only work with size M.”. “You don’t have L, do you?”, I asked. “No, you’re too fat, that size we don’t sell.”, she said” (Palmeira 2019). This condition is shown that apparel industry disregarded plus-size women and “marginalized them because they often seen as less fashionable” (Peters 2014).

Furthermore, in the entertainment industry, they always put woman who is embody the ideal body standard as the main character, the center, because they are

expected to be able to attract people's attention (Widyana 2016). In contrast, plus-size women usually take unimportant role because for society plus-size bodies are not suitable for public display (Colls 2006). The same condition also applies on the print media. In most of the magazines, they frequently only present the women who have the beauty standard such as thin, tall, white skin, and small face. It emphasized the stereotype that plus-size body was considered as unattractive one. The mass media is keep spreading this message and being received by the society for many years.

Through the development of technology in these days, the medium that have contribution in spreading the beauty myth is not only limited on mainstream media, but also the social media. One of the applications that become popular lately is Instagram. Instagram, a platform that specializes in photo and video sharing, gains a lot of popularity lately since its launch in October 2010. In this platform, the user can create profile and upload their contents such as photos, videos, and add textual material such as text caption. They can also set their account as public or private account. In addition, nowadays, Instagram releases more features which improve virtual communication amongst their users; Live, Instagram story, photo filters, stickers, and so on. This platform currently gains more than 1 billion active users per month, and shares over 95 million visual contents per day (Osman 2018).

In social media, people do not only become the receivers but also the influencers for ideas. People can share their life and see other's personal life through the social media. In this modern day, people can reach popularity through

social media. They can attract people through their self-representation and idea that they bring to the society. In Instagram, those famous people called as *Celebgram*. According to Maharani and Totoatmojo (2015), *Celebgram* is defined as the users who have a high number of followers in their Instagram account. As *celebgram*, they have to maintain their popularity in that platform and their self-branding for boosting their commercial value (Khamis, Ang and Welling 2017).

The market of social media platform is almost similar with the mainstream media. The contents in that platform keep spreading the beauty myth amongst their users. In the Instagram, the *instragammer* will see some influencers share their contents such as work out day, diet plan, and their body that is usually called as body goals. It emphasizes the idea which is for all women if they want to look attractive and gain attention; they have to have ideal body like what they see on Instagram. However, after many years people only focuses on body goal based on the society standard, recently people start to aware about body positivity movement.

Body positivity movement is a movement that popular in the social media recently. This movement encourages women who are not suit with the beauty standard on society to accept themselves and being gentle toward themselves (A. E. Alentola 2017). In the online community, the user can feel supported and empowered by other users, and encouraged them to post their body positive-photo or video. The idea of the movement is to represent the body as it is and “not portray women as they often are portrayed: with male gaze, gender-norms and Western beauty standards” (A. E. Alentola 2017). This social phenomenon also

changes the market of social media platform. In Instagram, the women *celebgram* is not only dominated by the women who possess the ideal beauty standard but also the plus-size women.

By following the recent social phenomenon in the society, some of women *celebgrams* represent their self-branding as the opposite of the beauty myth. They are breaking the stereotype regarding slimness as the only standard of being beauty. Many plus-size women models prove that they can be a representation of beauty with their body image. One of the wonderful plus-size models is Ashley Graham. She is an American model who succeed break the society norm about body size. In 2016, she is the first plus-size model who appeared in the *Sport Illustrated Swimsuit Issue* as the part of swimsuitforall's #CurvesInBikinis campaign. She is not only appearing in fashion magazines, but also appear in advertisement like Revlon, and starred some music videos such as "Toothbrush" by DNCE and "Girls like you" by Maroon 5.

The researcher chooses @ashleygraham's Instagram account as the object of the study because through her Instagram, she offers alternatives in seeing standard of beauty by breaking the stereotype of ideal beauty in the Western society; also empower other women to believe to themselves that their beauty beyond the number of their weight. In her Instagram's account, @ashleygraham, she often publishes her photos and videos that display her plus-size body without any filter to cover up her cellulites, bare face, tanned skin, and so on. The figure of Ashley Graham is the opposite of the representation of ideal beauty in the beauty myth which is tall, slim, and proportioned face (Wolf 2002). She takes a

big part in the body positivity and health at every size movement. She actively works as “body activist” through a campaign called #BeautyBeyondSize to educate people about body positivity and self-acceptance through TED talk.

Furthermore, Ashley Graham also wrote a personal essay addressing double standard of body shaming in the society. Ashley Graham’s presence really affect many women outside there, as reported by *Vogue*, she said ““I definitely think that my body has changed many peoples’ lives. I’ve used my body as a tool to talk about taboo subjects, such as cellulite or being insecure about lower belly fat—and also talk life into your body and have an affirmation kind of conversation with yourself. And I know the lives that have been changed: young girls and even women my age who have written me and said, ‘I never loved the skin that I was in until I heard your journey’” (Regensdorf 2017). Through her self-branding, Ashley Graham’s Instagram account shows how Ashley Graham succeed to be an influencer even though she does not possess any standards based on the beauty myth.

There are three studies have been conducted by other writers regarding the issue of beauty myth, women’s body ideal, and the influence of social media. The first study is conducted by Shuxiu Laarhoven in 2018, entitled *Social media, beauty standards and Chinese women*. The second study that relevant with the issue of this study is a thesis entitled *The Platformization of Beauty on Instagram* by Sophie Elena Slutsky. This thesis established on 2020 and took Instagram as the object of the study. The third study that examined about beauty standard is conducted by Lejar Alvianti Kiswari entitled *Victoria’s Secret Sebagai*

Representasi Standarisasi Kecantikan (Analisa Semiotika dalam Akun Instagram dan Youtube Victoria's Secret).

Based on the explanation above, the writer chooses to examine the shifting of ideal beauty standard in the society because in the recent day, the women start to aware that the concept of beauty is weapon of the patriarchal society to limit themselves (Wolf 2002), and they are worth more than the judgement from the society. The shifting of ideal beauty standard also appears in the social media platform as one of the social phenomenon. Through the social media platform, many plus-size women speaks up and represent themselves as the beauty even though they do not fulfil the beauty myth stereotype in society. This study will use the concept of beauty myth by Naomi Wolf as the main theory and also apply Barthes's theory of semiotic in order to examine the object of the study.

1.2 Statements of the Problem

In order to reveal how *@ashleygraham* Instagram account portrays beauty, the writer would like to state two questions to analyze:

1. How the beauty is portrayed in *@ashleygraham's* Instagram account?
2. How *@ashleygraham's* Instagram account negotiates the concept of beauty myth?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statements of the problem, this study aims to:

1. To identify how Ashley Graham portrays the beauty concept through *@ashleygraham*'s Instagram account.
2. To reveal how *@ashleygraham*'s Instagram account negotiates the concept of beauty myth.

1.4 Significance of the Study

For a long time, the large segment of plus sizes was ignored by fashion designers and retailers, but recently the consumer, critics, and blogger of plus size segment have been significantly raising their influential and purchasing power, not satisfied with being left behind. The plus-size consumers are constantly petitioning executive of "Victoria Secret" to launch bigger lingerie size. The largest size of panties that it offers is 16, while as a rule fashion industry defines plus-size as those from 14-24, and some fashion retailers even sell the sizes up to 28 in order to cover the existing demand (Ponomarenko 2016). A group of consumer have a feeling of their limited ability to buy and wear "Victoria Secret". After a several year, "Victoria Secret" looks to be making substantial changes to keep up with its more body-inclusive rivals that have been slowly chipping away at its market share. Nowadays, "Victoria Secret" also hire plus-size model to their product to make their product acceptable for every body size. Along with the emergence of body acceptance awareness and the shifting about the body image

displayed in “Victoria Secret”, the plus-size influencer also appeared. One of the famous plus-size influencer is Ashley Graham.

Ashley Graham, an American model, through her Instagram account, @ashleygraham, displays different perspective from the beauty myth regarding the concept of beauty. Furthermore, this study has three main aims. First, the writer hopes this study might give more acknowledges about the portrayal of beauty in @ashleygraham’s Instagram account from different perspectives. Second, since the majority society in US’ model still values the beauty myth, this study is expected to give some broader views and understanding the issue about the boundary between the beauty and the non-beauty among women in society that oppress women physically and mentally. Third, the writer aims to provide beneficial sources to English Department students at Airlangga University, especially to those who analyze the beauty myth as the issue.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Beauty myth : The idea of female beauty image that constructs and controls women based on their physical appearance against women’s advancement (Wolf 2002).

Body Positivity : A growing cultural movement that offers people the opportunity to put down the burdens of judgement, comparison, and shame

in order to cultivate a relationship with themselves that is built

on a foundation of self-love and trust (Sobczak 2014).

Celebgram : A sudden celebrity that has many followers to endorse products

from a particular brand or online shops (Maharani and Totoatmojo 2015).

Plus-size : A clothing size for people who are larger than average (Quirk 2021)

Body image : A complex and dynamic construction of society's culture (Jones 2019).