CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents information in general regarding research. It consists of the research background, statement of problem, research objective, research significance, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Research Background

Beauty pageants, which are competitions to determine who is the most beautiful woman, have both physical and psychological assessment parameters. This competition that is specifically for women does not only focus on external beauty but also inner beauty. The inner beauty referred to here can include an assessment of personality, intelligence, talent, and social involvement. In other words, these beauty pageants attempt to present women with a "complete" package that includes *beauty, brain, and behavior*. Many believe that the image of female beauty is not only seen physically but also in terms of intellectual and emotional intelligence. However, in reality, physicality or performance remains the first sight that will influence society's view of a woman's beauty (Pratiwi, 2018).

People's views on the concept of beauty are the result of continuous media exposure. Sari (2016) in her article entitled *Beauty Contest: Between Exploitation and Women's Existence*, states that beauty contests spread both domestically and abroad always receive special attention from the media. Such a phenomenon is called popular culture. According to John Storey (1993), popular culture refers to cultural texts, which are symbolic and whose main function is the production of meaning; for example, a newspaper article, a television program, or a pop song. The term 'text' has a broad meaning that refers not only to the written or spoken word but also to any aspect of culture that aims to produce meaning or signify.

The media that is the focus of this research is the online media Instagram. Based on research conducted by Pew Research Centre (2015), Instagram is the second biggest platform after Facebook with 52% of users. Instagram as part of

social media is now one of the media that has become an agent of lifestyle propaganda. As part of the lifestyle, Instagram becomes a representation of image. This social media constructs society into lifestyle groups, where people's lives are organized based on the themes, images, and symbolic meanings that are poured. The lifestyles that are attempted to be constructed through Instagram include appearance, masculinity, femininity, including beauty.

Representation is how a person, a group, an idea, an opinion, a reality, or a particular object is presented in a text (Puspitasari, 2013). According to Stuart Hall, representation is the use of language to convey something meaningful. Stuart Hall asserts that representation is the process of producing meaning using language (Marwah, 2019). Another definition of representation comes from Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic theory. He defines representation as the relationship between thing, object, and interpretent. In his view, semiotics occurs when the existence of a sign relates to the meaning of the object sign to produce meaning in the mind of the interpreter. Simply put, representation is how someone or something is portrayed in the media. There are at least three elements involved in representation. First, the object, which is something that is represented. Second, the representation itself (the sign). Third, the rules that connect the sign to the subject matter. It serves to limit the meanings that may arise in the process of sign interpretation (Purwati, 2019).

In the process of representation, women's position is reduced to a commodity object that is consumed visually. Then the woman's self in the form of her social and psychological aspects is eliminated, because it only pays attention to the visual form. This representation then causes the emergence of beauty standards. The standard of beauty itself is a requirement or necessity in a beauty which then forms a criterion (Rachman, 2021).

Beauty standards eventually becomes material for comparison by women against themselves and other women they encounter in various media including social media. Many women start to hate themselves for not being able to look like the perfect women they see on social media. Not stopping there, it then influences

other forms of negative activities such as strict dieting, eating disorders, and so on. Women feel that they are under pressure because they cannot fulfill the ideal standard of beauty as propagated on social media.

Each country with its ethnicity and diversity has a varied concept of beauty. The distinguishing factors of beauty standards in various countries are differences in cultural backgrounds, customs, and beliefs (Hapsari & Sukardani, 2018). But in reality, in this era of globalization, the ideal size based on local values is marginalized because of the massive imaging that is carried out and rapidly spreads widely in various media including Instagram. It has an impact on women's perceptions and self-image. This is triggered by the representation of beauty on the Instagram social media platform that influences women's perceptions of themselves and judgments of their appearance.

Therefore, this research is needed to provide a better understanding of the diversity of beauty standards based on cultural and other factors. This research can also help readers understand how the Instagram influences women's views on beauty and body ideals. In addition, this research can also provide inspiration and support to women to celebrate their diversity and natural beauty.

The theory used in this research is Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Roland Barthes is a structuralist thinker who practices Saussure's linguistic and semiological models. He argues that language is a manifestation of the assumptions of society in a certain period of time. His theory emphasizes three pillars of thought that are at the core of his study, including denotative, connotative, and myth.

Denotative is a sign that can be seen with the naked eye. In other words, it is the real meaning and can produce explicit, direct, and definite meaning. Denotative is also called the first system of meaning. Then, connotative is the meaning contained in certain signs or can also be said to be implicit meaning. Connotative is also called the second system of meaning. Meanwhile, myth is a sign or meaning that develops in society due to the influence of customs and socio-culture on something by showing the correlation of the obvious (denotation) with the implied

sign or meaning (connotation). More clearly according to Barthes' theory, myth is a form of development of connotation. Myth comes from a pre-existing chain of meanings or it can also be said to be a second-level meaning system. Myths in Barthes' theory are different from myths in that we consider superstitions, nonsense, and so on. However, the myth referred to in this theory is a person's style of speech.

The reason why Roland Barthes' theory is used in this research is because it has a specialty in the semiotic theory which is a myth. Myth is the result of social construction that is believed or agreed upon. One form of myth is women's beauty standards. A woman's beauty standard is a gender study, and it is included in the modern myth. In addition, Barthes' theory also emphasizes the importance of deconstructing cultural stereotypes. Research on American women's beauty standards can use this theory to identify and explore stereotypes that may exist in images of women's beauty, such as stereotypes about ideal skin color, body size, or hair.

Another reason why this theory is used in this research is because it has adequate methods that are useful for reading and analyzing visual objects in the form of photographs. That is because the objects used in this study are captions and several photo samples taken from 3 accounts on Instagram including @noeliavoigt, @umasofias, and @z.queen18_.

First, @noliavoigt is the personal Instagram account of Noelia Voigt. She is an American model and beauty pageant titleholder who was crowned Miss USA 2023 on September 29, 2023. Miss USA is a beauty pageant in the United States that has been held every year since 1952. This beauty pageant is held to select a representative of the United States to compete at Miss Universe. Second, @umasofias is the personal Instagram account of Uma Sofia Srivastava. She was crowned Miss Teen USA 2023 at the pageant held in Reno, Nevada. Miss Teen USA is a beauty contest held by the Miss Universe organization for teenage girls aged 14-19 years. Lastly, @missmulimahusa is the official account of Miss Muslimah USA. The current Miss Muslimah USA is Zaynah Hasan. She is a Muslimah who was crowned Miss Muslimah USA 2022. It is the first-ever beauty pageant for

Muslim women. It was founded in Columbus in 2017 and the first event was held at COSI.

The first previous research on the representation of the concept of female beauty that the researcher read was research from Dini Aprilita and Refti Handini (2016) which analysed "REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE BEAUTY IN INSTAGRAM SOCIAL MEDIA (Roland Barthes Semiotics Analysis of @mostbeautyindo, @bidadarisurga, and @papuan_girl Accounts)". This study aims to uncover the representation of beauty displayed by the accounts @mostbeautyindo, @bidadarisurga, and @papuan_girl. The results of the study show that the three accounts represent beauty differently. The beauty myth displayed by the @mostbeautyindo account is modern and sensual beauty. The @bidadarisurga_ account shows Islamic beauty. And the @papuan_girl account shows a beautiful locality (Aprilita & Listyani, 2016). In this study, the theory has similarities but differs from the object used.

The second is from Choirunnisa and Hendy Setiawan (2023) who analyzed "SEMIOTICS ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S BEAUTY STANDARDS IN THE GENERATION Z ERA THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA TIKTOK: JHARNA BHAGWANI AND NANDA ARSYINTA TIKTOK ACCOUNT". Roland Barthes' semiotic approach is used to analyze female beauty standards in the Generation Z era through TikTok social media. This theory is used to find the denotation, connotation, and mythical meanings of each video uploaded on TikTok. The results of this study show that women in Generation Z have the freedom to be beautiful according to their own version and do not compare what is in themselves with what is in other women. The concept of female beauty is also not only seen from what looks beautiful from the outside, but inner beauty also supports the concept of beautiful women in Generation Z (Choirunnisa & Setiawan, 2023). In discussing the second previous study, the researcher also used Roland Barthes's theory.

The third is from Ayu Sofiah Rachman (2021) from Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University entitled "THE MYTH OF WOMAN'S BEAUTY STANDARD THROUGH DEAR ME BEAUTY ADVERTISEMENT ON INSTAGRAM". To

find the myth of women's beauty standards displayed through the advertisement of a local Indonesian product called Dear Me Beauty, the researcher in this study uses Roland Barthes' theory of myth. The data used in this research are images and captions as much as 30 data from Dear Me Beauty Instagram account posts. From the data, the researcher found the myth of female beauty standards that exist in Dear Me Beauty advertisements, including the importance of self-care such as caring for the face and appearance. The Indonesian beauty standards shown in this study are categorized into three types, namely skin color, body image, and age.

The research gap between the previous research above and this research is the object of analysis. The first previous research examined several image samples taken from 3 Instagram accounts namely @mostbeautyindo, @bidadarisurga, and @papuan_girl which were thoroughly explored through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Furthermore, in the second previous study, the object studied was a video uploaded to Jharna Bhagwani and Nanda Arsyinta's TikTok account with the same theory from Roland Barthes. The last is the object of research on Dear Me Beauty cosmetic advertisements found on Instagram, with a research focus on the myth of female beauty standards. From these three previous studies, in this study, the researcher used the object of study in the form of several images taken from 3 USA beauty pageant Instagram accounts including @noeliavoigt, @umasofias, and @z.queen18_. The focus of interest in this research is the representation of US women's beauty standards on Instagram.

Although one of the problems in this study is the same as previous studies, especially regarding women's beauty standards. However, the beauty standards studied in this study come from a different country from previous studies. If in previous studies the beauty standards studied came from Indonesia, in this study came from the United States. In this era of globalization, the United States (US) has become one of the benchmarks for women's fashion and beauty. According to news site Insider, the US is the top country to win the most Miss Universe titles in the world with 9 titles. Most recently, US representative R'Bonney Gabriel won Miss

Universe 2022 (Annur, 2023). It's no wonder that many people adore and follow the beauty standards that prevail there.

One of these American beauty standards is represented through the Instagram accounts @noeliavoigt, @umasofias, and @z.queen18_. The three accounts display the beauty standards of selected women who have passed the beauty contest selection. This research will thoroughly explore the concept of beauty standards of American women with culture and other aspects behind it, as well as how the representation of beauty standards is displayed on Instagram. The study in this research is an important step towards creating a society that is mentally and physically healthier, more inclusive, and more aware of diverse beauty.

1.2 Researh Questions

The main problem of this research is the representation of American women's beauty standards through beauty pageants such as Miss USA, Miss Teen USA, and Miss Muslimah USA. Based on the explanation of the research background above, the researcher has several problems that will be discussed in this study.

To be more specific, the researcher makes several questions they are:

a. What are denotations, connotations, myths that found in the Instagram photos and captions of American beauty pageants?

b. What beauty standards does the American beauty pageant represent to American women?

1.3 Research Objectives

To examine and describe the problems above, the researcher makes several goals so that this research can be useful for readers. The research objectives based on the research question are:

a. To know what are denotations, connotations, myths that found in the Instagram photos and captions of American beauty pageants.

b. To know what beauty standards does the American beauty pageant represent to American women.

1.4 Research Significances

The researcher expects the readers can take an advantage of this research which is the advantage specially divides into two; they are theoretically and practically.

1. Theoretically, the findings of this study are expected to play a role and be valuable as, 1) enrichment of linguistic research, especially in semiotic studies; 2) bibliographic variations for readers; and 3) a source for the next type of relevant research.

2. In terms of practice, the results of this study are expected to: 1) provide an authentic source of study related to the representation of women's beauty standards on Instagram through a semiotic approach; 2) provide a deeper understanding for readers in analyzing symbols, signs, or icons through semiotic studies; and 3) inspire other studies to develop and conduct other research in the same scope with different subjects.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Beauty Pageant: A beauty pageant or beauty contest is a competition that has traditionally focused on judging and ranking the physical attributes of contestants. The beauty pageant is one site in which the meanings ascribed to individual and cultural identities are continually negotiated and often vehemently contested (Banet: 1999).

Beauty Standard: Beauty is an abstract thing. It is a relativity because everyone has a different view of beauty. Everyone has a different opinion about beauty. This means that a woman who is considered beautiful by one person will not necessarily be considered beautiful by another. Therefore, describing beauty is quite difficult because it can become a standard. The standard of beauty itself is a requirement or necessity in a beauty which then forms a criterion.

Connotation: According to Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary 2000, connotation is the idea conveyed by a word in addition to its primary meaning. According to Roland Barthes, connotation is a term used to explain the way a

sign works, describing the interaction that occurs when a sign meets the feelings or emotions of its users and their cultural values (John Fisk 1992).

Denotation: According to the 1993 dictionaire de la langue Francaise, denotation is the first level of signification which means the permanent sense of a syllable and describes the literal meaning of a sign. The denotation of a visual image thus refers to what the sign means. A sign is viewed without any connection to culture, ideology, or anything else (Bouzida, 2014).

Instagram: Instagram is an application for sharing photos and videos with unique features that make it look like a digital album. The advantages of this application include being accessible through smartphones, providing 16 filters to change the appearance of photos and videos, and the ease of sharing uploads to other social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and others.

Myth: Myth is a sign or meaning that develops in society due to the influence of customs and socio-culture on something by showing the correlation of the obvious (denotation) with the implied sign or meaning (connotation). More clearly according to Barthes' theory, myth is a form of development of connotation.

Representation: Representation is how a person, a group, an idea, an opinion, a reality, or a particular object is presented in a text (Puspitasari, 2013). According to Stuart Hall, representation is the use of language to convey something meaningful. Stuart Hall asserts that representation is the process of producing meaning using language (Marwah, 2019).