

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Humans learn to understand themselves in a gendered way from childhood. This learning process begins after birth (postnatal) and emerges from society. It is channeled through parents, siblings, peers, and then gradually the entire community presents upon one's developing identity (Stoller, 1984). The categories of sex as male and female are culturally established (Revathy & Hemmige, 2022). This gender differentiation and categorization are legitimized through images and words throughout life (Rigotti & Pereira, 2021). Thus, gender identity is formed as a result of psychological influences that make it purely a social construction.

Santamaría-García (2021) proved that gender identities are built through gender practices. This is in line with Butler (2006) who argues that gender is performative, which means that it is always doing. It is not something that is written on one's body, nor determined by nature, language, symbolism, or patriarchal history. In this sense, gender is not a noun but a verb. This series of actions that are repeated continuously constructs one's gender (Saeed & Quddus, 2021). Thus, society constructs our gender which then creates our identity.

In our society, the concepts of those aspects of sexuality, such as biological sex, gender identity, and gender role are often mixed together. Stoller (1984) stated that gender identity refers to the knowledge and awareness that one belongs

to one gender and not the other, while gender roles are related to the social roles played by individuals in society. Therefore, gender identity is how individuals perceive themselves as male, female, or a combination of both or neither, which are not always the same from the sex assigned at birth (biological sex), while gender role is how individuals behave in society to establish their position with others.

Those concepts that are often mixed together eventually create gender stereotypes. Hentschel, Heilman, & Peus (2019) defines gender stereotypes as general agreement about what men and women are like. Assumptions about how men and women differ in terms of ascribed traits, role behaviors, occupations, or even emotions. Traits and attributes are the most common measures of gender stereotypes that are thought to define certain agents and communality. One example of gender stereotypes measured from traits is that men must be brave, while women must be gentle because bravery is considered a male trait and gentle is considered a female trait.

Gender differences are exaggerated to limit women's gender roles. In many English advertisements, men are often presented with the image of a leader, while women are often placed in a subordinate social status (Chen & Liu, 2020). These advertisements subtly exaggerate the differences between men and women in professional lives and indirectly underestimate women's role and contribution to social life.

As reported by Revathy & Hemmige (2022), the study of gender representation in advertising began in the early 70s. Previous research has proven that advertising stereotypes gender roles and images. Thus, advertising plays a

vital role in strengthening the stereotypical representation of gender and influencing the audience on the concept of gender roles, especially in depicting the relationship between men and women and their roles using various images.

Suprun et al. (2022) found that masculine and feminine stereotypes in advertising reflect the specific requirements that exist for men and women's character traits in society. The social roles that are stereotyped for women in advertisements are family roles, such as excessive emotionality, the role of mother or housewife, and maintaining appearance as a priority feature of women. While advertising stereotypes about men are professional roles, including trust and authority, dominance, sexuality, rationality, consumption, and excessive freedom.

These gender stereotypes ultimately classify what attitudes and behaviors are considered appropriate and inappropriate. As happened to Sandiaga Uno who went viral for using lip balm when appearing formally in public with the Governor of DKI Jakarta on December 13, 2017. It was considered unusual, even several online media headlines questioned his action, such as "Men Like Sandiaga Uno Use Lip Balm, Must He?". It happens because lipstick is often associated with women. This implies that the media is questioning Sandiaga Uno's masculinity, given the general view that most feminine men belong to the gay group, which is still a sensitive topic, as differences in sexual orientation are still considered inappropriate by society, especially in Indonesia (Sarwono & Fayardi, 2018).

The increasing number of metrosexual groups in urban communities and users of male skincare products is the result of the development of industry and the media, especially advertising in the media (Sarwono & Fayardi, 2018). Advertisements use images that are understandable and familiar to the audience so

that consumers can identify themselves with the advertisement. One of the most popular methods of persuasion is based on gender stereotypes (Beloedova et al., 2021). Various cosmetic products for men are becoming more acceptable because they are labeled specifically to give a masculine impression, for example by using the term *guyliner* for eyeliner, *manbag* for handbag, *mankup* for makeup, *manscara* for mascara, and so on (Sarwono & Fayardi, 2018).

Previous studies have proven that advertising reproduces traditional gender roles and thus supports deep-rooted gender stereotypes in society (Beloedova et al., 2021; Chen & Liu, 2020; Jarad & Hadi, 2021; Reichl et al., 2018; Revathy & Hemmige, 2022; Sarwono & Fayardi, 2018; Suprun et al., 2022; Yuniantari et al., 2021; Zeb et al., 2021). These studies discuss various gender issues, such as the functioning of a female image, the construction of female identities, gender bias, sexism, gender representation, masculinity construction, stereotypical roles, and the depiction of gender roles, especially in literature, television, and print media but none of them challenge the deep-rooted gender stereotypes and comes from social media.

The elimination of gender stereotypes is also supported by the fact that the consumption of male cosmetic products is increasing. This is evidenced by the Grand View Research (2022) that the size of the global men's personal care market was valued at USD 30.8 billion in 2021 and is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.1% from 2022 to 2030, with the skincare product segment dominating the market and holding the largest revenue share of 45.6% in 2021. Meanwhile, a survey conducted by Euromonitor revealed that more than 56% of US male respondents used some type of facial cosmetics

such as foundation, concealer, or BB cream at least once in 2018 (Warfield, 2019). Thus, it can be said that nowadays men do not only use grooming products but have also started trying makeup.

Recently, the writer noticed a shift in the media regarding the trend of destroying the stereotypical image of men and women in society (Azuma, 2021; Frankel, 2020; Stelmaszczyk, 2019). The writer realizes that few pay attention to this trend in advertising on social media, especially Instagram. Previous studies have found that more than 40 cosmetic brands reinforce gender stereotypes in constructing the image of ideal men and women by providing values and beliefs that exist in a patriarchal society (Kalender, 2020; Maulida, 2015; Mendrofa, 2020; Radzi & Musa, 2017; Sarwono & Fayardi, 2018; Suprun et al., 2022; Tehseem & Kalsoom, 2015; Widodo & Loisa, 2022; Xu & Tan, 2020; Zeb et al., 2021). In addition, from the 40 brands above, there are 8 cosmetic brands with genderless claims according to their website, including Dove, Garnier, L'Oréal, Tarte, NYX Professional Makeup, MAC Cosmetics, CoverGirl, and Olay. However, only 5 brands have decorative cosmetic products, including L'Oréal, Tarte Cosmetics, NYX Professional Makeup, MAC Cosmetics, and CoverGirl. Nonetheless, these brands have proven to still use gender stereotypes in their product names and advertisements. Furthermore, most of these brands show their inclusive claims on their skincare products only. In this regard, the writer decided to conduct a study on Boss Lady Cosmetic advertisements on Instagram because the brand focuses on decorative cosmetics which are still often considered controversial, by employing visual and verbal strategies that contrast with gender stereotypes in constructing a genderless makeup narrative.

Boss Lady Cosmetic is one of the fastest-growing cosmetic startups based in Mumbai, India. It was founded by Kajol Bafna in August 2018 and launched in February 2019 with products ranging from lipstick called *Love Pens*, *Play Stix* (shaped like a crayon that can be used on the eyes, lips, face, and body), eyeliner called *Hug All Day Waterproof Eye Flicks*, and highlighter called *Pop Lighters*. They are available online on their website (Bafna, n. d.; Bhatia, 2020; Boss Lady Cosmetic, 2022; Gogoi, 2020).

Boss Lady Cosmetic claims that their brand is 100% committed to the environment by dealing only with clean cosmetics, meaning that their products are vegan, cruelty-free, paraben-free, and contain no harmful toxins. They claim that they eliminate plastic in their outer packages, they do not hoard their bloggers with big boxes, and they also have a policy where they accept empty containers for recycling. They do small-batch manufacturing and they work with vendors who supply mica ethically. Not only that, but they also claim that they represent all individuals with a range of makeup specially curated for men and women regardless of sexual orientation, size, color, or origin (Bhatia, 2020; Boss Lady Cosmetic, 2022; Tripathi, 2020).

As far as the writer is aware, there is no study that examines the construction of genderless makeup narrative from cosmetic advertisements on Instagram using a feminist perspective. Previous studies have only described the cosmetic advertisements using Social Semiotics and Transitivity system without connecting them to specific issues. Meanwhile, this study in particular examines the way in which cosmetic brand play a role in constructing genderless makeup

through their product advertisements by employing visual and verbal strategies using a feminist perspective.

This study focuses on five Boss Lady Cosmetic advertisements posted on Instagram in 2021. The five advertisements are selected by the writer with considerations that challenge gender-stereotyped images, such as containing male images and/or gender-related features, which might help in constructing the genderless makeup trend. The advertisements will be analyzed to identify the values associated with the brand and the semiotic aspects that they employ as strategies in constructing genderless makeup trends. The data analyzed are in a form of visual text and verbal text. The writer uses Kress and van Leeuwen's Social Semiotics theory to analyze the visual elements and Halliday's Transitivity System to analyze the textual elements to reveal how Boss Lady Cosmetic plays a role in constructing genderless makeup by challenging gender stereotypes through various visual and verbal strategies in its advertisements, which may have rarely been done by previous researchers.

1.2 Research Questions

How does Boss Lady Cosmetic construct the genderless makeup narrative in their advertisements?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to analyze how Boss Lady Cosmetic constructs the genderless makeup narrative in their ads by employing the visual and verbal aspects as strategies to further establish the relationship between the represented participant in the ads and the viewers.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on five Boss Lady Cosmetic advertisements posted on Instagram in 2021, including the captions. The advertisements are chosen on the basis of the writer's consideration that might help in constructing the genderless makeup trend.

1.5 Significances of the Study

The writer hopes this study would be useful to be a reference study related to gender and media studies, specifically regarding the issue of genderless makeup in advertisements on Instagram. The proposed study is significant because it discusses the trend of genderless advertising on social media that includes male images in cosmetic advertisements. Meanwhile, the previous studies have more often focused on the construction of masculinity, gender bias, gender representation, and the depiction of gender roles in literature, television, and print media, which does not include male images, especially in the cosmetic advertisements they discuss. This study is also expected to increase the reader's awareness of certain norms imposed by a brand due to advertisements that seem to represent an ideal image or examples of 'right' behavior which ultimately dictates how people behave.