

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Media for a long time has used beautiful women as an ideal image to attract readers and for selling the products (Freitas, Jordan, and Hughes, 2018). Many women feel the need to look certain way in order to be accepted by society and media playing a big role in shaping the idea of beauty to people, such as magazines that always feature beautiful women on the magazine cover and present articles on how to be beautiful and acceptable in society have influenced the readers about body image (Bahr, 2020). Cosmopolitan magazine, as one of the best selling magazine in the world, has succeeded in convincing their readers the idea of beauty by presenting thin Caucasian models on the cover page for over 50 years as a social ideal (Maslow, 2015). Cosmopolitan magazine is well-known for stirring controversy over the women on their magazine cover and the articles that give women tips on becoming thinner and hotter (Landers, 2010).

Continuing its popularity, Cosmopolitan is more than a magazine it is an "empire, a brand, a state of mind" (Dukut, 2014). As Cosmopolitan innovating in a variety of ways to expand their audience through its content, Cosmopolitan became a magazine that women would use as a guide to beautify themselves (Maslow, 2015). Women's magazine is considered to be the most important media to expose this idea

into women's thought. It used many ways to invest perception to women such as interesting visualization, beautiful models, life tips and words to attract the readers and also media plays an important role in shaping people's perception of the ideas of beauty in a woman. Without knowing Cosmopolitan has made a beauty standard through its cover which is represented through the model that represents ideal women are Caucasian women that tended to be thin, blonde hair or have blue eyes (Maslow, 2015).

According to the publicity statement of National Magazines Company (Hearst magazines UK., 2012), the logo proposition of Cosmopolitan is to be “the magazine that celebrates fun, glamour, men and a passion for life and inspires young women to be the best they can be”. With Helen Gurley Brown as the editor, Cosmopolitan added the close-up cover photo of a woman who appeared to be aware about fashion, however also of her overall performance and her sexual appeal; mostly a model in minimal clothing (McGuire 2010).

Hoglund (2016) stated that for the past 40 years, the only changes on the cover of Cosmopolitan cover have been the clothes, the make-up and the hairstyle following the changes in fashion and part of how the magazine has constructed the ideal performance at any given point in time. The woman for the cover (usually a model or a celebrity) has been chosen, as Whitehorne (2007) puts it, “to portray the mood and aims of the magazine” and her function is to be a “stylized, idealized mirror” of what the reader “could be like”. Thus, the contents of the magazine

construct behaviour patterns and instruct women to adopt unrealistic (sometimes even harmful) models of “performances” (Bordo, 2004). Indeed, women’s magazines shape the dispositions and actions of their readers in the same way that literature does.

Therefore the plus-size models that present on the cover page of Cosmopolitan magazine show that Cosmopolitan magazine has following the changes in fashion industry that beauty and size are not inevitable link (Gurrieri and Cherrier, 2013). Ashley Graham made history as the first plus-size model to be featured in in the swimsuit edition of Sports Illustrated magazine, a notable breakthrough but yet another in which the achievement was one of sex appeal. She was, after all, wearing bikini like so many of the other models in the issue. The over-sexing of plus-size bodies in fashion is indicative of a wider societal tendency (Avila, 2015). As Ashley Graham said in her famous TedTalk, "My body, like my confidence, has been picked apart, manipulated, and controlled by others who didn't necessarily understand it. Once I reclaimed ownership over my body, I discovered a greater purpose as a woman who was defying preconceived standards of feminine beauty." The fashion world embraces plus-size women, that embrace tends to one extreme, leading to the sexualization of plus-size women in media because curvy body has been the sexier bodies in fashion industry because the model has fuller breasts and fuller hips (Avila, 2015). Cosmopolitan magazine featuring with plus-size model in the cover page indicated plus-size model as the object of sexual desire because since the mid-1960s,

the cover 'Cosmo girl' dressed in an outfit that signify leisure and sexual availability and with a provocative headlines that offering the readers 'Love, Success, Sex and Money' (Maslow, 2015).

Building on Foucault (1978), discussions on body politics have focused on how power operates through discourses that are produced and maintained by the state and its various institutions. The emergence of consumer sectors requires a model who portrays the purpose of the magazine and serve what the readers could be like, in many cases, teaching the readers how and what to consume. At the same time, what a model products on their bodies and become living embodiments of the possibilities of consumption for the readers (Otis, 2016).

The argument about using thin models rather than the plus-size model is because thin models are more selling. "Statistics have repeatedly shown that if you stick a beautiful skinny girl on the cover of a magazine you sell more copies. At the end of the day, it is a business and the fact is that these models sell the products" (Gillian, 2000). The plus-size models in fashion world do not really match the real meaning of fat in society. The range of the plus-size model is ten to twenty in women's clothing but most of the models are size ten to fourteen with a minimum height of five feet eight inches and six feet maximum. Otherwise, fashion models use size two to size six, while the runaway model uses size zero to size four depending on their needs.

On March 2014, Robyn Lawley, a six feet two inches model with a size 12, became the first plus-size model as the cover of Australia Cosmopolitan. She has been featured in Australian Cosmopolitan for her successful business story (Cosmopolitan, 2014) and on August 2016, Ashley Graham, five feet nine inches with a size 16, became U.S Cosmopolitan's cover after became the first plus-size model to cover both Sports Illustrated and Maxim magazine that target men (Avila, 2015). And later, on October 2018, Cosmopolitan UK made Tess Holliday, a plus-size model, as their cover and stirred controversy because of poor body image in people's mind. Tess Holliday is a five feet five inches model with a size 22 (Cosmopolitan, 2018).

Cosmopolitan has been criticized for promoting obesity because featuring a plus-size model on the cover (O'Connel, 2018). The public statement of acceptance that women come in all shapes and sizes but still criticized Holliday's body shape and said it might be actually attractive is an act of controlling one's body. People are judged by their bodies, color, and sex. Culture, society, and economy are things that ascribed how the body is represented (Crusmac, 2013).

There have been many studies exploring the portrayal of women's body in media. Research has shown that media play an important role on shaping people's mind about body image and Cosmopolitan magazine is one of them. The research about the succession of Cosmopolitan magazine and transnational culture that Cosmopolitan and its magazine brings and how it has taken in the local to support the

global has been conducted by Dukut (2014) entitled *The Transnational Success of Cosmopolitan Magazine*. Cosmopolitan has a long history as a women's magazine that support and advice women through their daily life. As a transitional magazine, Cosmopolitan dictates criteria for the selection of cover models and editorial. In addition, a study conducted by Gudekli (2014) entitled *Using Woman in Advertisement as a Symbol of Sex: Cosmopolitan Magazine Example*. From the analysis of three advertisements in Cosmopolitan Magazine, Gudekli states the portrayal of women as sexual object on advertisements are represented in the elements that lead the reader's mind to sexuality, such as the look that established by the model and the excessively expose the model's body.

The other study entitled *Post-Feminism and Specialized Media: A Content Analysis of Cosmopolitan Headlines* by Crusmac (2013) identified the trends that post-feminist media promotes as the new values of today's women. In doing so, Crusmac analyzed the contingency of the terms found on the covers of Cosmopolitan magazine. Cosmopolitan magazine promotes the exploration and understanding of female sexuality, sexual pleasure becomes a goal for women that necessarily to be fulfilled. Cosmopolitan magazine support the ideal of female beauty promoted by women's magazines constructed through practices of consumption (news about fashion often include specific recommendations and advices to purchase products that belong to certain famous brands) and the "management" of the body (recommending a healthy lifestyle through sport, outlining certain areas of the body or recommending

diets that help losing weight). In contemporary society the body becomes the support of self identity and beauty practices are normalized as fundamental elements of the feminine selves. This argument is supported by another study that discussed about how women's body being represented in the media a research by Freitas, Jordan, and Hughes (2018) entitled *Body image in women's magazine* explored about body image representation through media has been linked with body dissatisfaction particularly among readers of women's magazine.

Moreover, the construction of beauty through marketing and advertising actively contribute to the normalization of idealized beauty forms and sizes, and deviations from this are considered abnormal. Gurrieri and Cherrier (2013) conducted a research about *Queering beauty: fatshionistas in the fatosphere*. This research analyzed the representation and experiences of beauty amongst fat woman and investigated how beauty is negotiated and performed through "fatshionista" – a fat female who disrupts normalized understandings of beauty and its social categories via active participation in cultural fields of beauty. Additionally, Yan Yan and Kim Bisses (2014) conducted a research about *The Globalization of Beauty: How is Ideal Beauty Influenced by Globally Published Fashion and Beauty Magazines?*. As a social construct, the ideal of beauty and attractiveness is not immune from the pervasive trend of globalization. According to the previous studies above, the present study attempts to fill the gap by examining the body politics issues on the cover page of Cosmopolitan magazine.

Those previous studies deal with Cosmopolitan magazine's influences to the readers and body image in media. In consideration of the existence of the contradictive issues within the cover page of Cosmopolitan magazine, this study will explore body politics of plus-size model on the three selected editions of Cosmopolitan magazine using Kress and Van Leeuwen theory of social semiotics and M.A.K Halliday theory of Nominal Group and Transitivity. The three editions are selected based on issues this study will explore.

1.2 Research Question

How is body politic of the plus-size model portray in Cosmopolitan magazine's cover?

1.3 Purpose of The Study

In accordance to research question, the purpose of the study is to analyze how body politic of the plus-size model is represented in Cosmopolitan magazine's cover.

1.4 Significance of The Study

This study expected to give significance to the readers the body politic of the plus-size mode in the meaning behind Cosmopolitan magazine's cover through social semiotics analysis and this study hopefully can be used as reference by another researcher who wants to conduct a similar subject.