
Theorizing Beauty Regimes: Indonesian Women Performing their Gender Ideology and Resistance through Makeup

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ABSTRACT

This article is about how Indonesian women talk about their beauty practices. They are aware how their beauty routines are often seen as banal and shallow but simultaneously essential to their gendered beings. However, this article argues that women are able to subvert the deprecating narratives of their beauty regimes into empowering ones while maintaining the same practices. Through their practices, they seem to conform to the beauty requirement in society. However, through their discourse, they present their beauty regimes with perspectives that put their free will and agency at the centre of their beauty regimes. The research used a sample of twenty-two Indonesian women aged from the mid-twenties to mid-sixties, to ask about beauty routines. Their answers are analyzed by using feminist discourse analysis to seek possibilities of subversion and empowerment. Another theoretical approach used in this research is the politics of everyday lives. The problematization of everyday practices allows for the deconstruction of ideology that perpetuates gendered norms of beauty. This research is significant because it provides a blueprint for further research on gender politics in the 21st century that focuses on everyday practices.

Keywords: *beauty; everyday lives; gender; Indonesia; postfeminism; women*

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this article was sparked by the burgeoning number of beauty channels on social media. Digital technology has enabled beauty tutorials to become a new and significant genre in social media. Beauty influencers use a familiar discourse of beauty but they transform the daily beauty jargon into narratives of empowerment (Handajani, 2020). This article goes beyond the beauty influencers by asking middle class women themselves about their beauty routines. How these women describe their beauty regimes is of interest because it provides insights into the gendered construction of their narratives. It is not the ubiquitous nature of makeup in women's lives which necessarily posits as a problem but rather how makeup relates to gendered identity politics. This article

is an exploration into the nature of everyday practices of gender in order to reveal its conformity and resistance.

This article explores narratives of performativity and postfeminist practices from discourses of women's beauty routines. The analysis is done with a feminist approach using the theory of everyday practices. It aims to show that gender conformity or gender resistance does not always rely on macro practices or full-scale activism. On the contrary, it can be manifested in micro practices such as beauty regimes carried out in the privacy of these women's bedrooms. This research is significant in demonstrating that everyday things and mundane practices are important vehicles for perpetuating oppressive gender ideology. In a similar vein, resistance and negotiations

with this ideology can be expressed through the same micro-practices by reversing or reclaiming the narratives of the practice. As Michele White (2018) argues, makeup can be a battleground for identity politics.

The application of facial beautification products has long been pervasive across cultures in the world (Rudd, 1997). However, gender dynamics in the 21st century has feminized many of these beauty regimes. Putting on makeup has predominantly become a feminine domain. Women put on makeup to communicate their identities and express their social relations to others. When makeup is applied skilfully on the face, people tend to notice the face rather than the cosmetics. This way, makeup has become a mask that allows women to play their roles strategically according to the mask that they are wearing (White, 2018).

In the postfeminist context, the discourse of makeup has occupied two extremes: on one hand is the use of makeup as empowerment and on the other hand makeup is seen as oppression (a legacy of the discourse from second-wave feminism). However, postfeminism allows for nuances between these two extremes. This article demonstrates how women narrate their beauty practices to revert the discourses of makeup from objectification into a subjective agency. Therefore, this article explores beauty routines, the theorizing of ordinary things, and investigates the potential of these daily routines to become a tool of resistance.

Makeup permeates the daily lives of women. Its association with beauty has made makeup a tool for reaching a gendered glory. Failing to do so could lead to what Reddy calls “feminine failure” (2016: 79). The choices that women make in terms of their beauty regimes and the way they present themselves offer insights into their social system. Nudson (quoting Cottom (2021)) states that “beauty isn’t what you look like, it’s the preferences that reproduce the social order.” It also offers a look into the past because the idea of beauty has a “multi-generational effect” (Thompson 2019: 246). What these women do to their faces is the accumulation of traditions going back a long way. Danesi even argues that “...in modern-day urban cultures, cosmetic industries are contemporary reflexes of ancient practices...” (2019: 129). Makeup rituals can thus provide a socio-cultural window to observe both the transformation and the preservation of ideologies in society. This is possible to do when makeup ritual is seen as a process of meaning-making. Takacs (2015: 6) argues that “culture does not inhere in objects or texts, but in the practices people use to make sense of those objects and texts”

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The data for this research was acquired through interviews with twenty-two Indonesian women who wear makeup on a regular basis. The definition of makeup used is broad that is, anything that they apply on their face to enhance their looks. The women were acquired through random snowball sampling using social and friendship network of the researcher who is a middle class female and a university graduate. These women were invited to participate either through social media or by offline invitation through direct contact. The age range of these women is from 22–44 years old except for one woman who is sixty-five. The age range, apart from being the result of a random selection from the author’s social network, also indicates the considerable time that these women have practised the beauty routine. The women who participated are from the middle class, twenty one of whom work and one is not currently working. Twenty of them are university graduates and two of are graduates from vocational studies. Eighteen of them are married and four are single women. The nature of this research is an exploratory one and these women are not intended as representative samples, but rather this research is seeking to discover from the interviews the kinds of negotiations and strategies that they employ in the midst of contradictory narratives about makeup. The interviews are analyzed as social and cultural products of gendered ideology. Makeup is the entryway to delve into the significance of the repetitive mundane practices to perpetuate or resist deep seated ideologies.

The results of the interviews are analysed using Ien Ang’s (1985) method in searching for keywords and key points from interviews that are worthy of further analysis. The three main questions asked of these women were: what are your makeup routines? What do you think is the purpose of wearing makeup? What is the meaning of makeup to you? However, the fluidity of the structure of the interview allows for extensions and elaboration from these three questions which led to fluid conversation. The answers are then indexed and identified for recurring patterns. The analysis is meant to be indicative rather than comprehensive. The purpose is to find indications of how these women define themselves through their makeup and how their conversation reveals social structure and order in regards to their gender. One of the indicators (though not exclusively) that a keyword or a theme is worthy of further analysis is the repetition of key ideas from different interviews. These ideas could emerge in their wording or expressions. These words and expressions are then grouped thematically. Ang asserts that:

What people say or write about their experiences, preferences, habits, etc., cannot be taken entirely at face value, for in the routine daily life they do not demand rational consciousness; they go unnoticed as it were.... This means that we cannot let the [transcripts] speak for themselves, but that they should be read ‘symptomatically’: we must search for what is behind the explicitly written, for the presuppositions and accepted attitudes concealed within them (Ang, 1985: 11).

In order to search for “what is behind the explicitly written” connections and correlations are made by locating keywords from interviews against the gendered socio-cultural backdrop where the words originated.

Identification and analysis of the words and expressions from the interviews are carried out using feminist critical discourse analysis. The aim is to seek explanation for women’s oppression or to seek alternative discourse for empowerment (Ringrow, 2016: 105). This method is a part of critical discourse analysis (CDA). In CDA, language is a social practice tied to a specific historical context and ideology (McLoughlin, 2017). Danesi argues that words in a language are “Conventional signs, ... [and they] are the product of human intentions” (2007: 7). The words used by the women to describe their makeup ritual can be used as entryways to look deeper into the social system that constructs their practice of gender. The application of feminist CDA allows this research to link social and historical background (the macro-level data) with the practices and rhetorical strategies (the micro-level data) gained from the interviews (McLoughlin, 2017: 24).

THEORIZING THE ORDINARY

The ordinary refers to several things, one of which is the mundane. The theorizing process of ordinary things in this research is taken from Daniel Miller and Susan Woodward (2012). Ordinary things have also been the focus of study in other fields, such as pop culture. Norbert Elias argues that, “.. the concept of the everyday has become anything but everyday: it is loaded with theoretical reflection” (Elias in Storey, 2014). These theories allow for academic discussions on matters regarding something as banal as putting on makeup. The mundane and the banal are significant because of the nature of their taken-for-grantedness (Danesi quoting Hoffman, 2018). The naturalizing process seems to evade any refusals simply because daily practices are seen as “just the way things are.” However it is precisely these

miniscule practices that allow discriminative ideologies to thrive because they are embedded in the practices and go uncontested in our daily lives. Foucault (1978). has exposed the hegemony of daily lives as normalcy and common sense in society. An example of the application of this Foucauldian theory is shown by the simple act of putting on clothes (Taylor, 2017: 52). On a daily basis, this act is charged with gendered norms with disciplinary power, which Foucault refers to as self-surveillance. This kind of self-policing reveals how intense the hegemonic power is that governs the action. It turns the daily mundane activities into disciplined actions that impose a simple but ideologically laden question: what should I wear today? Due to gender imbalance, self-monitoring, and public scrutiny, women have to make a lot of judgment calls on their mundane fashion routines not to transgress what is expected as natural or normal.

The process of beautification occurs daily, and it transforms into a ritual. According to Miller and Woodward, rituals which are practiced intensively and extensively with little to no alternatives create what Bourdieu terms ‘habitus’ (Miller and Woodward, 2012: 130). In a gendered habitus, if these women are constantly exposed to images and practices of women with beauty regimes (from the media and female family members), they would see that things like fashion consciousness and a simple act of putting on makeup are common sense. The process of adopting makeup rituals as something regular and routine leads to normalization. It then becomes a practice associated with women. Judith Butler then takes up this repetitive gendered practice to theorize the performativity of gender (Miller and Woodward, 2012). Butler argues that gender is made up of micro-practices that repeat themselves to maintain the identity of that gender (2011). These micro-practices occur daily, and they become so normalized that they escape observation. In other words, they become too elusive to deconstruct. It shows how ordinary and mundane practices become a reproduction arena of gender ideology.

POSTFEMINISM

Postfeminism has a range of meanings. It covers the diverse nature of advocacy, and it acknowledges diversity in women. Dosekun claims that there are a variety of understandings and uses of the theories and concepts of postfeminism (2021: 2). In this research, this variety is seen as an enrichment of the ideology to match it with any case at hand. Due to the fragmented nature of women (as opposed to the monolithic white women’s hegemony of the second-wave feminism), many postfeminist

movements are directed to individuals because they reject the overgeneralization of the second wave. Hill argues that postfeminist gains are filtered through, "...a grammar of choice, empowerment and individualism" (2021: 3). An individual woman's resistance is enough to warrant being in movement, given the diverse nature of women's demands for gender equity—a response to the second-wave feminism that emphasizes sisterhood but at the expense of female minorities. However, individualism, in this case, is not to be misinterpreted as gendered practice in isolation. Gill (in Hill 2021: 3) argues that "postfeminism is a critical analytical term that refers to empirical regularities or patterns in contemporary cultural life." In other words, individual practices derive from a socio-cultural context. So to combine this with Butler's theory above, the identity of a woman requires a repetitive set of practices which is historically located. Riley adds to this by claiming that, "... gender as a performance, [is] created through a complex combination of interactive historical traces" (2019: 3).

Following up from Gill, female oppression and female empowerment are present in the form of contemporary practices. One of the postfeminist movements is about reclaiming the practices used to undermine women to become a source of agency and empowerment. Reclaim means to detach a practice from its patriarchal value by creating a fresh set of discourses that overturns the value (Thomas in Nash and Whelehan 2017: 183). This is the postfeminist way of thinking echoes how cultural studies gives tribute to everyday culture (Danesi, 2019: 15 – 18.). According to cultural studies, culture consists of the little things that ordinary people carry out regularly and daily. They are not necessarily big or festive moments in celebratory fashion. Similarly, postfeminism, in this case, is a nod to women's micro practices of gender. The women's discourse of these practices have the potential to reject the value while continuing the practice.

BEAUTY ROUTINES AS GENDER PERFORMANCES

None of the women interviewed were obligated to wear makeup at their workplaces therefore wearing makeup is a matter of choice. Having said that, it does not necessarily mean that going without makeup will not have some social consequences. It simply means that even though putting on makeup is a choice, most of the time women who wear makeup are seen to have made a wise choice in doing so. This age range demonstrates that some gendered rituals (like putting on makeup) are

almost a life-long performance.

The women interviewed for this research have been exposed to feminine socialization of makeup through the media and the circle of females around them (female family members or colleagues). One informant, Nina, said that since a very young age she observed how her mother diligently applied her makeup in the morning before she went to work. Several women also alluded to the role of fellow workers in providing references about beautification and makeup. This routine creates the concept of a gendered habitus for women (cf, Miller and Woodward, 2014: 149). Bourdieu uses this concept to analyze the lifestyle and material culture which creates a class. However, its application to gender helps shed light on how repeated actions become naturalized over time and so gender is a pervasive result of habitus. Certain conditions groom women to be feminine according to patriarchal demands, which, in this case, is to be pretty through using makeup. This is made possible because there are no alternatives (hence the term habitus).

The women in this research have their own makeup rituals, including the order of application and brand preferences. The ritual has become a performance of identity that has to be repeated in order to claim the identity (i.e. a woman has to act like a woman every day). Following Butler's theory of performativity, beauty ritual exposes the impermanence of identity. Makeup is worn in the morning before work and it is cleansed off in the evening before they retire for the day. The temporary nature of makeup should help prove the unnatural character of gender since it consists of temporary actions that need to be repeated. Beauty is a social construction that consists of repeated actions to display and perform itself. Feminine beauty does not just happen. By extension, this train of thought allows the idea of gender to be seen as a compilation of continuous actions. It offers a possibility of deconstruction if certain parts of the gender acts are subverted or not performed. As Holmes argues, "If gender is learned and done, it can be done differently." (2008).

Most women know that they are expected to perform everyday acts that fit their gender (cf. Chin, 2018: 149). Discrimination might occur if they do not perform well. Although the common expected outcome of putting on makeup is to appear beautiful, most of the women did not mention beauty as the goal of their makeup routine. They expressed it in different ways, such as "to look fresh", "to look neat", "to look clean", or "to look tidy" or "to look healthy". To be clean and healthy is a human necessity, not necessarily a gendered one. Redefining the feminine act of putting on makeup as a non-gendered

ordinary routine can be seen as an effort to eliminate the stereotypical connections between women, makeup and beauty. However, it shows the uneasy position women are in with regards to performing their gender routines. They appear as being vain if their efforts are too apparent, but they will look careless if no effort is shown. Women know the pressure to appear attractive, yet they seldom acknowledge that (cf. Yonce, 2014: 49).

When asked why beauty is not mentioned as the purpose for putting on makeup, one woman puts it, "It's not about being pretty. Because beauty is a given, regardless of your makeup." (Tika). Despite all the effort to enhance their appearances, women realize that beauty should not be overtly pursued. Being able to appear effortlessly beautiful preserves the mystique of beauty. It is in line with the conventional concept of beauty that regards it as a natural thing. Nudson asserts that "In the dominant culture, beauty was deemed more valuable if it was natural—or if it appeared to be natural" (2021: 136). The idea that being beautiful and natural are strongly connected is almost a global phenomenon (Cf. Jones, 2010: 62). The discourse of naturalness belies the rituals that go on behind the scenes to achieve that look. The passive nature of beauty (where it just appears on a woman's face) is reminiscent of the passive character expected from women. Holmes claims that women have been taught to be passive since they were little (2008: 46), that even her beauty is not an active endeavour. Since beauty is linked to the female character, it is symbolically used to indicate a woman's personality. Nudson argues that "...And if a woman's worth was dependent on her looks, it's likely that some women used cosmetics to subtly achieve that "naturally virtuous glow" (2021: 63).

The natural characteristic of female beauty is also extended to the material culture around women. Matthews says that "...material culture is...an extension of the body" (2000: 16). Since the body is a social construction, the material culture is a response to that social construct. A global brand like Olay would sell their whitening product using the words 'natural white'. The phrase seems to overlook the unnatural effort of putting on the lotion. Viva Cosmetics, a local Indonesian brand, also has a similar tagline. The website states that Viva Cosmetics can create "naturally beautiful skin of Indonesian women". Advertisements for beauty clinics also promote services and goods with similar lines. Nature and natural appearances are conflated into a symbolic unity which proposes that natural beauty is aligned with natural ingredients and natural processes. Natasha, one of the popular beauty clinics in Indonesia, proudly displays its slogan "Nature Meets Technology".

Larissa, another beauty clinic, brags of processing "natural ingredients with high technology". These two examples fit in with the feminine cultural demand of "looking natural" as one of the prerequisites of aesthetics. Additionally, global beauty discourse adds to the quest for natural beauty. Laham observes that in the US "The 1960s counterculture movement celebrated ideals of natural beauty" (2020:100). The trend continues to the 21st century with beauty style that promotes "no makeup" makeup, which emphasizes a makeup-free look.

In Indonesia, where this research was conducted, the association between beauty and its natural state has a long sociocultural history. The country's former president Sukarno commented on the appearance of Indonesian women as cultural representatives of the nation. According to Sunindyo, "Sukarno attacked women's make-up. He clearly stated that he did not like women with make-up who would be 'dependent on imperialist products', and that he agreed with 'traditional beauty make-up/tips' rather than 'western products' " (1998: 8). This is not uniquely Indonesian, because other places around the globe also give women the roles of cultural representatives. For example, Jones stated that, "in practice, Nazi ideology towards the use of cosmetics, as in many other matters, was contradictory. Insofar as there was an official policy, it was not to suppress cosmetics use, but rather to employ them to promote Nazi fantasies about the "natural beauty" of the allegedly superior German race" (2010: 124). These examples confirm that "External and tangible factors influence one's evaluation of beauty. However, one is also influenced by intangible values based on a certain ideology or the political system one lives under" (Nam et al., 2021: 62).

As mentioned above, the discourse of beauty is rife with paradoxes and contradictions. Most women are aware that they are expected to use makeup to improve the natural features of their faces (Schweitzer 2005: 258). However, they are not allowed to appear obsessed by it (see Olson 2009: 294). These contradictions have resulted in a particular way of explaining their beauty routines. These women frequently downplay their own beauty regimes and sometimes dismiss them as unimportant. They often use the words "only" or "just" to trivialize their own makeup rituals. Dini says that "For me putting on makeup is **only** to prevent me from looking like I just got out of bed. My makeup routine is simple—**only** moisturizer, BB cream, loose powder, lipstick" [emphasis is mine]. Anty similarly comments that "I don't often wear full makeup. Mostly **only** lipstick and mascara." [emphasis is mine]. Another woman, Ibu Rahma says, "The truth is I stay away from makeup. As far away as

I can.... Because your skin needs to develop naturally [not covered up with face powder or foundation].” Then I asked her, “So you never wear makeup [apart from special occasions like going to wedding receptions]?” She answered adamantly, “Never. I **only** wear lipstick, eyebrow pencil, and eyeliner every day. Just that.” I enquired again, “You apply them to go out?” And she replied with equal conviction, “No. I wear them at home after I shower every day. But I don’t do makeup.” Imagine a face covered with lipstick, eyebrow pencil, and eyeliner, and yet to declare it as “wearing nothing” may sound absurd. However, it makes sense to align the statement with the cultural discourse that beauty should come naturally without any concerted effort. Ibu Rahma’s answer is located within this discourse. Nudson explains that “Women often deny makeup’s importance as they are powdering their faces” (2021: 7).

The pervasive nature of the media makes beauty discourse a transnational phenomenon, creating a global language of beauty. Research by Rudd in the US had similar findings when she enquired regarding women’s beauty routines. The women in her research answered as follows: “I wear only moisturizer on my face...”, “Only mascara, chapstick, and perfume,” “Only makeup to some features (lips and cheeks, or just eyes),” “I do less—it is the same facial routine, but I wear less makeup, just eyeliner, mascara, lipstick, and lipliner.” (1997). From these answers the similarities are obvious where the women make their makeup routine sound less important. There are many ways to interpret beauty routines considering that there are local contexts available. However, if female oppression is a global phenomenon (Langwe, 2019: 57), then the resistance would be a worldwide phenomenon as well. Beauty is universally recognized as a feminine endeavour, so it is no wonder that they will share similar discourse. Craig argues that “...women who engage in beautifying practices get placed on a continuum that stretches among the points of hygiene, respectability, self-care, and vanity..” (2021: 7). Simultaneously and paradoxically, a woman’s value is strongly gauged by her beauty, where men set their standards (Blondell, 2013: 1, Craig, 2021: 1). This paradox is precisely replicated in the answers of these women. The women are responding to this contradiction. They do not want to be accused as vain. Still, they realize that beautifying practices can be pleasurable if they are not associated with being subordinated to other people’s demands. The women are reversing the objectifying nature of beautification into a subjective claim that the process is not that big a deal (cf. Haulin and Baez, 2018: 18).

BEAUTY PRACTICES AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Beauty practices are both a personal and a social endeavour. As stated above, impressions of being vain in their makeup and their agency in wearing it are something that women have to juggle on a daily basis. McCracken asserts that “beautification [is] a process that is shaped by and shapes both social context and individual identities” (2014: 16). By putting on makeup these women are simultaneously proposing their own values and meanings of the makeup being used. On the other hand she is also expressing conformity and heeding the gendered interpellation that beauty regimes imply. These women’s social relations are expressed from the selective beauty practices that they do. Their appearances are responses to their socio-cultural environment. Some of these women refer to the quick assessment that they have to do in order to reject or accept the social codes around them through makeup. One woman said she wore slightly thicker makeup for important meetings, however at other times she would just come to work with thin, “barely there” makeup.

One of the women, Elis commented on the awareness of other people’s opinions when no makeup is used. There is this perception that if a woman fusses too much over her makeup, her time is wasted on that. Elis said that “I used to have the impression that intelligence and beauty didn’t go together. There was a period in my life when I thought like that. [When I was an undergrad] I saw that female academics didn’t put on that much makeup. And that usually leads to the assumption that the person is not smart”. The statement is an example of how the beautifying process can make women look vain, but beauty has the power to determine a woman’s destiny. Nye argues that “Various studies show that people rated as attractive are treated more favourably than unattractive people. Looks also affect politics and elections; one study finds that a handsome man enjoys an edge over an ugly rival worth 6 to 8 per cent of the vote. For the women, the edge may be as much as 10 per cent” (2008: 61). This shows how “beauty is political” (Craig, 2021: 1) both literally and metaphorically. Elis changed her mind when she did her postgraduate and met a female professor who seemed to her to “have it all” because she was smart and she wore full makeup. Elis argued that it is possible to be intelligent and to pay attention to how you look at the same time without being vain.

One comment frequently made by the women in this research is about their fear of overdoing their makeup. One woman, Yayuk mentioned that “I don’t want people in my office to gossip about me because of my

[thick] makeup.” As Elis mentioned above, overdoing their makeup might bring their character into question. Nudson asserts that “women were still judged by their beauty—outward appearance meant to indicate the goodness within” (2021: 63). Gaudy and thick makeup may bring the wearer’s skill into question, but it could also invite questions about her morality. Summers claims that women are seen as “ethically superior” beings (2016: 90). Unfortunately, one of the indicators frequently used to gauge a woman’s morality is her appearance (Nudson, 2021: 23). Historically a woman with thick makeup or red lipstick may easily conjure unwanted stereotypes of a prostitute (cf. Nudson, 2021). The long history of makeup and morality has long been part of a “female beauty system” where idealization of females’ beauty goes hand in hand with her subordination (Adams and Adams, 2015: 3). Women have to tread carefully and balance their appearance to reach the proper proportion of being morally good and aesthetically pleasing. Daily beauty routine becomes a gender management strategy.

A woman’s beauty regime is also her social system. The process of beautification reveals her connection to other people. A woman’s beauty practice is her social management system. Her beauty is a symbol of how she relates to other people. It is also an indicator of what is expected of her in terms of social rules. Sutton argues that beauty is more about governing behaviour rather than appearance (2009: 65). However, that is not to say that the women in this research are succumbing to social expectations. They retell their stories in a way that reveals their agency to define whether a social event justifies paying extra attention to their appearance. An event that is frequently used as an indicator of importance is a wedding. Nika says, “The closer my relation to the person who invites me to a wedding reception, the more effort I will put in. My seriousness in preparing my appearance is parallel to my closeness to the bride or whoever invites me.” This answer exemplifies how women control the purpose of their beauty. They set the terms of the social relations, and their makeup is used to decide the people’s level of importance. Nika’s reply resists the accusation of being beautiful for someone else because it is in Nika’s power to decide whether it is worth putting on extra makeup. Another woman, Willa, replies, “I don’t wear makeup on a daily basis. Not even face powder. However, for a wedding invitation, I think it is necessary to put on proper makeup along with the dress. It’s just a way to express my respect on such a grand occasion.” The rarity of the event and Willa’s willingness to engage in a beautifying process for an event of her choice (in this case, a wedding) indicates that makeup does not have

to be an obligation but it is an optional matter when she decides to “pay her respects.”

As mentioned above by Nudson (2021), beauty is a social system, but the women in this research express that they make the call on their appearances. Ibu Rahma argues above that she does not put on makeup apart from her lipstick, eyebrow pencil, and eyebrow liner. However, she claims that weddings deserve different treatment in terms of her appearance. Ibu Rahma says, “Putting on makeup means attending wedding parties so you would look different. You need to look different so people will know that you are not at home but attending a formal function.” Her answer indicates that different makeup marks different territory. It is in her power to mark her social territory by putting on makeup and looking different from her everyday appearance. Craig argues that beauty politics “...are also about how women have used beauty...to control how they were perceived” (2021: 4). Here, the women control the discourse of their beauty rituals and control their appearances to suggest that they are in charge of their looks rather following other people’s demands to look pretty. A different example is Lila, who did not want to wear makeup on her wedding day, “Initially I didn’t want to put on bridal makeup for my own wedding. I wanted to wear regular makeup. But in the end, my sister-in-law talked me into it because she said it was a tradition.” In Lila’s story, she uses makeup to express her resistance to the socio-cultural demand to appear a certain way. Her effort to resist shows her awareness of the symbolic discourse of bridal beauty. Ackermann asserts that bridal beauty is presented in many cultures and belongs to the man whom she marries (2011: 271). Lila’s initial objection to bridal makeup is her effort to gain control of her appearance. She is reverting from her look becoming an object and negotiating the beauty discourse to be part of her agency.

Through discourses of beauty rituals, the women in this research are able to narrate their beauty practices in ways that empower them. They provide different narratives that rejects the common stereotype of beauty practices that subordinate them as females. Lina claims that “Putting on makeup makes me feel that I am well prepared”. According to Lina, putting on makeup is a sign that she has good time management. Her reasoning overturns the common rejection of makeup in a typical second wave manner, which claims that makeup hinders women’s progress on practical and symbolic levels. Lina argues that her makeup is a sign of an organized life. Cila also objects to the notion that beauty rituals are a waste of time. Cila says, “The most important thing is that it [beauty ritual] makes me feel relaxed.” Cila is referring

both to her beauty regime and beauty treatment that she carries out regularly. To her, time spent on herself is not wasted. It echoes the widespread campaign of women giving themselves a well-deserved break with the phrase “me time.” Yayuk, on the other hand, argues that her makeup is a sign of her financial independence, “I bought my cosmetics with my own salary.” So when she puts on her beauty products on her face, her makeup is a display of feminine power. Craig asserts that “beauty politics are gender politics” (2021: 1). These women may be practising the same beauty rituals as other women elsewhere, but they subvert the discourse. McCracken claims that beauty is a sign of power and domination working on women’s bodies” (2014: 2). However, the above examples show that discourses of leisure and consumerism that negatively impact women are reversed and turned into the discourse of agency and free will.

Postfeminism in this research is a celebration of differences and fragmented identities among women. The above discussion is a demonstration that women are not a monolithic group. Male domination may be a universal thing, but with a postfeminist perspective the macro oppression can be made bearable or even empowering with micro activities. Postfeminism also allows for a wide range of women’s movements. As an outlook, postfeminism offers women the opportunity to change the perspectives and narratives of unfavourable conditions that they cannot eliminate yet.

CONCLUSION

Ordinary and everyday things are filled with power relations. Daily activities like putting on makeup contains hegemonic instructions for women to maintain their approved gender identity. In this research the power relations hidden in the narratives of beauty regime is disclosed by using feminist critical discourse analysis. Each word chosen by these women to tell their stories are words in response to their social conditions. Their responses are neither bowing to the gender ideology nor bluntly refusing it. Postfeminism explains this with the theory of strategic fluidity. Postfeminism is about questioning and breaking the boundaries of the “either or” condition.

This research has shown how women provide subtly powerful ways to interpret their beauty rituals. They are aware of how women are disparaged for the very same thing demanded of them, their beauty practices. The women in this research address the ambivalence surrounding the discourse of beauty practices by providing alternative stories behind their practices. They

have demonstrated how meaning-making is as important as the practices where the meaning originates. Taking charge of the interpretation of their beauty routines has proven to be one of the ways to reject banal identification of their practices.

This research concludes with the possibility of micro-practices as potential spaces to overthrow dominant discourse. If dominant power invades the politics of everyday lives, then the disruption of this power should take the same route. It is done by identifying how power works on a daily basis and then delicately destabilizing the power that preserves the practices by changing the discourse. The women in this research provide a case study on a very small scale. However, in a similar vein, the subversion on a grand scale has expanded in recent years with the explosion of beauty gurus. Beauty tutorials are doing the extreme version of what the women in this research are doing, providing their ordinary beauty regimes with reclaimed narratives of empowerment. It all started with the strategy employed by ordinary women which is providing new meanings to old practices. It proves that everyday acts are political but it is possible to unsettle the power that looms over those practices.

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