THE EXPERIENCES OF WORKING WOMEN IN USING MAKE-UP

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ABSTRACT

Beauty obsession is promoted by the popular culture. In search of a beautiful body and face, humans, especially women, struggle to achieve the ideal image of beauty. Understanding what is beauty and how beauty occurs are important. Cosmetics are expected to enhance physical attractiveness among women. Cosmetics can be viewed as a kind of technology for making the face more attractive. The aim of this study is to explore the experience of using cosmetics among working women; taking into consideration socio-cultural factors like education, occupation, economic status and gender role which influence them to use cosmetics in order to appear youthful and beautiful. This study employs the qualitative design. Focus group interviews (FGI) are conducted to obtain relevant data. Fifteen women are recruited in the study via the purposive sampling technique. All of them are working, married and use cosmetics in their daily lives. All interviews are transcribed and analyzed using the thematic analysis. Findings of the study reveal that cosmetics improve women's marital and work relationship. Maintaining great physical appearance is a responsibility of every woman. The practice of beautification, in this case, via the use of cosmetics is considered an important effort in maintaining a happy and harmonious life. Also, by applying makeup, these women experience positive emotional benefits like increase in self-confidence, courage and a better self-control. All of them agree that there is something therapeutic in cosmetic usage. Indeed, purchasing and applying cosmetics are interpreted as a manifestation of care about women's well-being.

Keywords: *beauty, harmony, make-up, wellbeing, women*

PENGALAMAN WANITA BEKERJAYA DALAM PENGGUNAAN MEKAP

ABSTRAK

Obsesi terhadap kecantikan adalah aliran dalam budaya popular. Untuk mendapatkan rupa yang menawan dan ideal, manusia terutamanya wanita berusaha keras untuk memilikinya. Kefahaman tentang kecantikan dan bagaimana terhasil adalah sangat penting. Penggunaan kosmetik dikatakan dapat meningkatkan kecantikan fizikal dalam kalangan wanita. Penggunaannya juga dilihat sebagai satu bentuk teknologi yang mampu membuatkan rupa paras seseorang menjadi cantik. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk memahami pengalaman golongan wanita bekerjaya yang menggunakan kosmetik; mengambil kira faktor sosio-budaya seperti pendidikan, pekerjaan, status ekonomi dan peranan gender untuk tujuan keremajaan dan kecantikan. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif. Temu bual kumpulan berfokus dijalankan untuk mendapatkan data. Seramai lima belas wanita yang dipilih melalui proses pensampelan bertujuan dilibatkan dalam kajian ini. Kesemua mereka mempunyai kerjaya, telah berkahwin dan menggunakan peralatan kosmetik setiap hari. Kesemua temubual ditranskripsi dan dianalisa menggunakan analisis tematik. Kajian mendapati penggunaan kosmetik telah meningkatkan hubungan dalam perkahwinan dan pekerjaan mereka. Mengekalkan kecantikan fizikal dikatakan satu tanggungjawab setiap isteri. Amalan berdandan merupakan inisiatif penting dalam mengekalkan kebahagian dan keharmonian hidup. Juga, penggunaan alat solek telah memberikan satu kesan yang positif terhadap emosi wanita bekerjaya seperti meningkatkan keyakinan diri, lebih berdaya saing dan penguasaan diri yang lebih baik. Kesemua mereka bersetuju bahawa penggunaan peralatan kosmetik mempunyai satu elemen penyembuhan. Sesungguhnya, pembelian dan penggunaan peralatan kosmetik dapat diterjemahkan sebagai satu manifestasi penjagaan diri dan kesejahteraan bagi seseorang wanita.

Kata kunci: kecantikan, keharmonian, alat solek, kesejahteraan, wanita

INTRODUCTION

Physical attractiveness and beauty are both socially and culturally constructed. They change over time and differ from one culture to another. The socio-cultural approach to beauty assigns culture as a major role in establishing and enforcing body ideals (Tiggeman, 1994). According to Tiggeman (1994), each culture develops specific social ideals of human appearance which are transmitted through cultural channels, then internalized by individuals. Beauty and body obsession is cyclical which contributes to widespread cultural messages and norms. Beauty obsession is promoted by the popular culture. In search of a beautiful body and face, humans, especially women, struggle to achieve the ideal image of beauty. Understanding what is beauty and how beauty shapes one's personality are essential. From a symbolic interactions perspective, beauty is an expression of embodiment which is not intrinsic but a result of action (Waskul & Vanini, 2006).

In any society, people develop a positive perception towards beauty. Physically attractive persons are associated with positive traits. For example, Dion et al. (1972) sum up that individuals often assume that physically attractive people lead happier and more successful lives than less attractive persons. Beauty is also associated with talent (Landy & Sigall, 1974). People are able to get away with inferior work if they are beautiful. Physical attractiveness may also lead to the 'halo effect' as suggested by Schneider (1973). He explains that physical attractiveness is a part of the implicit personality theory. This theory states that individuals sometimes give attention to peripheral attributes based on central attributes such as attractiveness. A body of literature supports and highlights the importance of beauty in the social context. Dermer and Thiel (1975) report that women who are physically attractive are often viewed as professionally competent and have the best chance in getting a sales jobs. Previous studies by Dion and Berscheid (1974) as well as Kleck et al. (1974) on interactions also find that physical attractiveness comes with greater peer acceptance.

The social rewards and benefits that are associated with physical attractiveness make women think seriously about their appearance and prompt them to make changes in pursuit of ideal beauty (Chapkis, 1986). Today, women prefer to use cosmetics as alternative to enhance their beauty.

Cosmetics can be viewed as a kind of technology for making the face more attractive. In this account, cosmetics function by manipulating biologically-based factors of attractiveness (Russell, 2010). Cosmetics are believed to make women look more stylish and beautiful. It plays a significant role in self-creation and turns a person into someone more presentable in front of others (DeLong & Bye, 1990). The aim of this study is to explore the experience of using cosmetics among working women; taking into consideration socio-cultural factors like education, occupation, economic status and gender role which influence them to use cosmetics in order to appear youthful and beautiful.

YOUTH AND BEAUTY CULTURE

Many studies have been conducted to discuss how society defines the concept of beauty. The definition of beauty or attractiveness depends upon where one lives and when one lives. Every society and culture has its own unique justifications in perceiving beauty. However, less resources can be found in defining the concept of beauty exclusively in the Malay culture. In the Western culture, those with beautiful bodies and faces get more out of life because beauty is highly valued (Black, 2004). Beautiful people are viewed as more intelligent, powerful, healthy and occupy a higher class in society (Plous & Neptune, 1997). The social construction of female beauty is well developed and become socially accepted. Eric et al. (2008) report that in Asian culture, having white skin is important in constructing the female beauty. The notions of 'good skin' should be smooth, young, pore-less, line free, bright, transparent, white full and fine. Among Filipino communities, dark skin is not valued and it indicates low economic status (Rondilla, 2012). The desire to improve one's physical attractiveness seems to be an inherent characteristic of most individuals (Adam, 1977).

The adoption of beauty trends and practices is more visible among girls and youth. Youths tend to place more interest in maintaining their self-images. As mentioned by Norudin (2010), in image building studies, cosmetics appear to be linked with females. In association with the concept of beauty, cosmetics can be considered as the powerful aid to help people, especially women, to enhance their physical appearance. Hunt et al. (2011) find the history of cosmetics and the cosmetics industry is dependent upon the consumers' perception. Perception of attractiveness is a function of the culture, society and the time-frame of the purchase. Specifically, what is considered attractive in one society may not be considered attractive in another society. In short, it can be concluded that both beauty and cosmetics are carefully selected by the people based on their culture and the society in which they live.

The notions of universal beauty in the media

Nowadays, cosmetics is one of the important needs to enhance human physical attractiveness. The usage of cosmetics is increasing in trend. An abundance of beauty product advertisements are made available through the media and social media. Women experience negative feelings or worry about their physical appearance when they compare themselves with a highly attractive figure featured in the media and advertisements. Women tend to develop a feeling of guilt and blame themselves for not doing enough to enhance their physical appearance (Fallon & Hausenblas, 2002). Moreover, various advertisements display a benchmark in the standard of beauty which unfortunately most women do not fulfil the requirements of an 'idealized' beauty. As a result, many women are disappointed with their own physical appearances especially their weight and shape (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Downs & Harrison, 1985; Silverstein et al., 1986; Etcoff et al., 2004).

According to Etcoff (1999), the need to reduce these negative emotions is one of the motivations which make women purchase cosmetic brands. The representation of highly attractive female models from the cosmetic advertisements is used as a mechanism to persuade women to buy the products. This representation of attractive role models lowers the self-image of female consumers. However, this mechanism simultaneously creates the feeling of relief among women when the products claim that the issue of one's appearance can be solved through the utilization of the advertised products. Richins (1991) states that media evokes temporary feelings of dissatisfaction with themselves and targeted consumers may indeed represent an adequate advertising strategy,

because it may stimulate consumers to consume cosmetic brands to improve their appearances and produce feelings of accomplishment through aesthetic self-enhancement.

Cosmetic selection

Davis (2013) in his study on African-American women's use of cosmetic products find that they start as early as at the eighth and tenth grades in school. They begin to apply cosmetics with the help and the guidance from their mothers. The young sees the mother as an inspiration to wear makeup once they get older. This process can be considered as one of the socialization process where the young learn from the members within the family in shaping their future attitudes. In this study, the researcher reports none of the women had any bad memories of trying cosmetics during their childhood. To them, wearing cosmetics is fun. Many participants reveal that generally they regard wearing makeup as a female or feminine thing to do. With all the different colours, textures, patterns and brushes involved, playing around with makeup can simply be seen as a fun activity, but some women believe that when they apply makeup and get a complete different look, it can be considered as an art.

However, there are also problems with the issue of cosmetics selection among consumers. Some consumers are not so much concerned about the implications of the cosmetics to their healthy body and skin. Some do not read the label to identify the ingredients and other useful information of the cosmetics products before they decide to use them. In addition, the cosmetic label itself sometimes does not clarify the ingredients used (Amasa et al., 2012). In Southwestern Ethiopia, 99.2% of the consumers admit they do not pay attention to what is written on the labels of the cosmetics products. Unfortunately, most of the products sold in this area contain at least two ingredients that are prohibited from usage. It is common that consumers randomly pick the products without thoroughly investigating the benefit or implication of using the products.

Most of the cosmetics users focus on the short term result to their skin appearance rather than the long term effects to the whole body. The whole process in cosmetic consumption always involve knowing the degree or level of consumer awareness towards the effects. Some consumers ignore whether the cosmetic will give the negative or positive effect. For this circumstance, it seems that many consumers do not know well about the sensitivity of their skin towards the cosmetic products. In another aspect, some consumers do not read the ingredients of the cosmetic products before they decide to use them. Some scientific terms used in describing ingredients are difficult to understand by the consumer (Norudin, 2010). In Malaysia, the main skin-care used by most Malaysians are whitening, brightening and lightening of blemish and acne scars and anti-aging (U.S Commercial Services Hong Kong, 2015). However, no studies specifically concentrate on the cosmetic preferences and usage among the Malays. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by studying the cosmetics preferences and usage among the Malays.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In his book entitled Interaction Ritual, Goffman (1967) contends that each performance is a presentation of self and that everyone seeks to create specific impressions in the minds of others. This universal drive is called impression management. Individuals manage others' impressions of them by successfully portraying themselves "onstage" or in public. People present themselves to others based on cultural values, norms and expectations. Most of the time, people seek to meet society expectations. In the study of beauty and cosmetics, this theory helps to explain the social construction of beauty. The idea of impression management in dramaturgy suggest that people are presenting a favourable image in order to garner positive judgments from others.

Millard (2009) also uses dramaturgy as guidance in her research on beauty standards among Canadian women. In understanding what is beauty and how beauty occurs, the dramaturgy perspective is relevant as it is also one of the branches in the symbolic interactionist perspective. As suggested by Waskul and Vanini (2006), beauty is not intrinsic but a result of a social action. Dramaturgical body is embedded in social practices. In conjunction to this, Millard studies the effect of beauty campaign on the beauty product named 'Dove' on the masses. Millard reports the findings

of her study by using dramaturgical approach which explains metaphorically the meaning of beauty with reference to the Dove campaign. Millard simplifies the beauty standards as the equivalent of a "beauty script" in which audiences expect actors to wear masks (make-up) and costumes (fashion) that fit the characters they are portraying. To be (act) beautiful is to play one's role in line with expectations. In Western cultures, celebrities and models are the stars of the show. They know the beauty script, inside and out. These are the reasons why the participants in this study describe "the ideal types of beauty associated with the models permeate in our daily world which they see on televisions, internet or billboards" (Millard, 2009:154).

In short, the concept of dramaturgy contributes to this study because beauty and maintaining appearances involve impression management and thus performance. A person's self and beautiful body arises from all kinds of interactions, face-to-face or mediated. So, the media play a crucial role in shaping how personas are projected. In the context of media culture, popular personas often bend to match the ideals defined by social scripts and the expectations of dominant industries. In return, media consumers' personas are shaped by how advertising and fashion script performances. For example, women may diet to lose weight for the ultimate goal of fitting into trendy clothes that are available only in models' sizes (Millard, 2009).

STUDY DESIGN

This study employs the qualitative method which offers a powerful means of learning about the individual's decision-making process (Doyle & Thomason, 1999). In this study, the meaning of cosmetics and beauty in people's lives can be acquired qualitatively. This method is most appropriate to investigate how the concepts of beauty and cosmetics may have changed over time and are differently viewed by many people. Qualitative analysis uniquely allows flexibility in research (Krueger & Casey, 2000) which is one of the important features in this study as it deals with the human experience and perception. The influences that shape a woman's decision to use cosmetics can best be understood through methods that allow each subject to reflect on her experiences and tell her story in her own words.

Study sample and data collection technique

All respondents are recruited via the purposive sampling technique. It focuses on several characteristics of the population studied. In this case, only women who are using cosmetics are interviewed. The samples in this study are married Malay women who use any brand of cosmetics in their daily lives. Participants are between twenty to forty years old. All are working women, completed secondary or tertiary study. Other characteristics include having an interest in cosmetics and beauty products as well as having used cosmetics for more than two years. This duration of using cosmetics is necessary to describe their experiences using cosmetics.

This study utilizes the focus group interview (FGI) technique. FGI is relevant for this study since it explores people's thoughts, sentiments and inspiration about beauty and cosmetics-related issues. The purpose is to uncover factors that influence people's opinions, behaviour and motivation about the beauty and cosmetics. The FGI is conducted in three sessions with five different participants for each session. This number is adequate to guarantee each respondent has a chance to react to the inquiries. Small groups will allow more opportunity for the sharing of ideas and it is easily conducted in premium space. The length of every session is between one to two hours. The Malay language is used during the interview sessions. The questions in FGI are carefully predetermined. The questions are phrased and sequenced so that participants understand the question in the way the researcher intends (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Open-ended questions are designed to allow respondents to share their opinions freely. These questions appear spontaneous but are developed through considerable reflection and input. All discussions are recorded with the respondents' permission. Participants are given tea and light snacks as an incentive for their participation in the FGI.

All research must observe ethics. The collection of data for this study is also in line with the appropriate research ethics which emphasizes the confidentiality and the validity of the sources. Data

collected from this study are kept confidential. All participants are required to sign the informed consent. The purpose of research and the rights of the participants in the research process is briefly explained at the beginning of the session. Data collected from this study are reported in ways that would not disclose the respondent. Pseudonyms are used in any reporting quotes.

Data Analysis Procedure

In order to gain insight and knowledge from the data gathered, the thematic analysis is used to report the findings of the research. The purpose of the thematic analysis is to identify patterns of meaning across the data collected which provide answers for all research questions. Clarke and Braun (2006) define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data" (p.6). It also allows for flexibility in research as well as rich, detailed and complex description of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cosmetics improved marital relationship

Through the FGIs, the participants share their experiences in detail on their cosmetics preferences and usage. One of the main reasons why they are using cosmetics on a daily basis is to help them enhance their husband-wife relationship. Most participants agree that beautification is one of the important aspects in improving marital relationship. Most of the participants agree that maintaining great physical appearance is the responsibility as a wife. The practice of beautification, in this case via the usage of cosmetics is considered as an important initiative in maintaining a happy and harmonious marriage.

One of the participants, Maria (28), shares her positive experience after using cosmetics:

> Using cosmetics enhanced my relationship with my husband. When I use a darker coloured lipstick, he always compliment me. I feel good!

Another participant, Su (33), says beautification is life changing for her. There was a time when she felt that her marriage was falling apart and she almost filed for divorce from her husband; then she decided to do a mini makeover using cosmetics. She appeared more attractive to her husband and according to her, their marriage was saved. Su mentions:

> I was messy and shabby before. I did not take care of my appearance. Because I felt it was not a priority at that time. Due to my negligence, my husband dated another woman. After that incident, I promised myself to improve and learn how to take good care of my appearance. I went to grooming classes and started to visit the spa. Now, my relationship with my husband is better and we are happy.

The importance of cosmetics use in marriage has also been supported by a previous study. Najla and Zarina (2016) affirm that neglecting beautification by the wife in marriage can diminish happiness and joy in the soul of the husband. The study suggests that married women should use cosmetics and appear presentable in front of their husbands for the sake of the marriage. The goal of marriage could not be reached if the wife is unable to make the husband happy particularly in regard to her appearance. A wife should maintain her appearance and present herself as neat and tidy. This is one of the keys to a happy marriage. In a similar vein, Taha (1995) asserts that maintaining a good appearance is one of her responsibilities as a wife. A wife should always appear neat and beautiful to her husband. This is the key to make a husband happy and calm. This effort can also prevent a husband from chasing after other women.

From another interview, Marina (35) affirms that the use of skincare and the beautification via cosmetics helps her relationship and it has a long term effect. She says:

> Using cosmetics and right skincare helps me look younger than my actual age. I am married for thirteen years and my heart flutters when my husband compliments me by saying: "Honey, you look young".

As a woman, looking young and beautiful for the husband is a must. This effort will create harmony in a marriage when husband always appreciate the beauty of his wife and feels proud when he sees how the wife is able to maintain her appearance even though they have been married for so many years. Indeed, maintaining beauty prevents a couple from being unhappy and getting a divorce. A good wife should keep up her appearance for her husband. Women should stay beautiful for their husbands and the use of the cosmetics and skincare undoubtedly helps. All women in this study want to be beautiful for their husband. In addition, when it comes to beauty, women will do more and take additional efforts to appear beautiful. From a wife's perspective, if a husband is attracted to his beautiful wife, the feelings of personal insecurity will gradually subside.

Ability to control and manage feelings

As mentioned earlier in this study, many women today are struggling to meet the beauty expectations. There are many challenges women encounter to fulfill those expectations. In this study, it can be concluded that the use of makeup is the reflection of feminity and interestingly it also helps in one's expression. Wearing make up boosts women's confidence level. It is more than just giving a woman a positive self-image. This study discovers that cosmetics empower women, gives women a sense of control over their looks. Having a sense of self-control is also pointed out by the participants. The use of cosmetics helps them to control their feelings and emotions. When they put on their makeup, they feel more controlled particularly when they are at work. Wani (29) mentions:

> Putting on makeup makes me more confident and feel presentable when I go to work. It shows that I am ready and prepared to start my routine at work for the day.

The similar feeling is also shared by Aminah (32):

> I personally dislike my eyelashes which are very short and staright. So, I always put on the best fibre mascara to ensure my eyelashes curl and appear attractive. I feel more confident when I put on the mascara.

The above responses show that women who put on makeup feel more confident especially when they meet other people. In this study, women are found to link their self-control with their personal makeup routine. In fact, these women claim that their achievements are attributed to their make up use. They explain how manipulating the appearance and being attractive makes them feel empowered, appear more extrovert, assertive and sociable. Interestingly, the women in this study reveal their daily makeup routines have assisted them to achieve their professional and social goal at work. Nana (28), who works as a teacher shares her experience and makeup routine:

> I found my students are more attracted to me when I use makeup. Students pay attention to me when I teach the class. If I do not put on makeup, they show less attention. Students will comment how I look. They tell me that I look pale and assume I am 'sick' without makeup.

Putting the best face going for work makes most women in this study feel more visible at work. Most of them share that they frequently receive compliments from colleagues and employers when they put on makeup. Fiza (33) said:

> When I put my fake eyelashes on, it makes me different from others. People easily recognize and remember me. I am selling insurance packages. So, it is

> very important for me to be remembered by others because it helps me to
> attain my target sales. My clients remember me more than other insurance
> sellers. My eyelashes are very helpful.

The above stories indicate the significant use of make up that helps Fiza and other women to appear visible and sociable. The use of makeup is seen as a tool for women to change their appearance and look the way they want. Indeed, makeup has a profound effect on these working women. Today, cosmetics are expected to enhance the physical attractiveness among women. In other words, women use cosmetics in order to enhance their beauty. Cosmetics can be viewed as a kind of technology for making the face more attractive. In this regard, cosmetics function by manipulating biologically-based factors of attractiveness (Russell, 2010). Women today are very conscious about the need to take care of their body and physical appearance. The findings support the idea of impression management in dramaturgy which suggest that people are presenting a favourable image endorsed by the society to garner positive judgments from others. In this case, women have used cosmetics to achieve that purpose.

CONCLUSION

In short, beauty and maintaining appearances involve impression management and thus performance. Like beauty, self is a social process, not an intrinsic entity that exists inside an individual (Tseelon 1992). A person's self and beautiful body arises from all kinds of interactions, face-to-face or mediated. So, media consumers play a crucial role in shaping how personas are played. In the context of media culture, popular personas often bend to match the ideals defined by social scripts and the expectations of dominant industries. In return, media consumers' personas are shaped by how advertising and fashion script performances. The social rewards and benefits that are associated with physical attractiveness make women think about their appearance seriously and prompt them to make changes in pursuit of ideal beauty. Working women, in particular, make adjustments in their lifes to maintain dignity and self-worth.

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