
THE POTRAYAL OF BEAUTY MYTH IN *UGLIES* MOVIE (2024)

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Abstrak

*Konstruksi budaya tentang kecantikan sering kali menjadi alat kontrol sosial dalam menekan perempuan dengan cara yang tampak alami dan tidak dipertanyakan. Mitos kecantikan mendorong perempuan untuk mematuhi standar kecantikan tertentu agar dapat diterima di masyarakat. Standar ini diciptakan dan dipertahankan melalui hegemoni, di mana ideologi dominan membentuk persepsi bahwa kecantikan adalah identitas utama perempuan, sehingga mereka secara tidak sadar menerima dan menyesuaikan diri dengan standar tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis mitos kecantikan yang dialami oleh karakter perempuan dalam berbagai aspek serta mitos kecantikan yang digunakan sebagai alat hegemoni untuk mengontrol individu dalam film *Uglies* (2024). Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif deskriptif untuk menganalisis data. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori *The Beauty Myth* karya Naomi Wolf yang membagi mitos kecantikan menjadi enam aspek utama. Selain itu, teori Hegemoni dari Antonio Gramsci digunakan untuk mengkaji bagaimana standar kecantikan diterapkan dalam film ini. Penelitian ini menghasilkan 13 data, yang terdiri atas: persetujuan: pekerjaan 1, budaya 3, agama 1, dan sex 1, sedangkan paksaan: budaya 3, kelaparan 1 dan kekerasan 3. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa aspek mitos kecantikan yang dominan dirasakan oleh karakter perempuan dalam *Uglies* movie (2024) adalah aspek budaya yang kemudian diikuti oleh bentuk penindasan lainnya. Sementara itu, penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa hegemoni yang muncul dalam film ini lebih banyak dilakukan melalui mekanisme paksaan dibandingkan persetujuan.*

Kata Kunci: *Feminisme, Gender, Hegemoni, Mitos Kecantikan*

Abstract

Cultural constructions of beauty often serve as tools of social control to oppress women in ways that seem natural and unquestioned. Beauty myths encourage women to adhere to certain beauty standards to be accepted in society. This standard is created and maintained through hegemony, where the dominant ideology forms the perception that beauty is women's main identity so that they unconsciously accept and adapt to this standard. This research aims to analyze the beauty myths experienced by female characters in various aspects as well as the beauty myths that are used as a hegemonic tool to control individuals in the *Uglies* movie (2024). The research method used is a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data. This research uses The Beauty Myth theory by Naomi Wolf which divides beauty myths into six main aspects. In addition, Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony is used to examine how beauty standards are applied in this movie. This research produced 13 data, consisting of consent: work 1, culture 3, religion 1, and sex 1, while coercion: culture 3, hungry 1 and violence 3. The research results show that the dominant aspect of the beauty myth felt by the female characters in the *Uglies* movie (2024) is the cultural aspect followed by other forms of oppression. Meanwhile, this research also found that the hegemony that appears in this movie is carried out more through mechanisms of coercion than consent.

Keywords: Beauty Myth, Feminism, Gender, Hegemony

INTRODUCTION

Literary work is a product of the thought of writers to convey their ideas to readers through oral and written language (Amalia & Juanda, 2021). Literary works can provide various experiences to readers. A strong literary experience, when read as a literary work and not as something else, is an affective and somatic as well as intellectual experience, and it is impossible to separate these dimensions (Attridge, 2015). Literary works consist of various forms, one of which is movie. Movies can be classified as a type of literary work because all forms of presentation are in accordance with the characteristics of literary texts and can be analyzed using a textual framework. According to (Klarer, 2013) one form of literary work in the 21st century is the movie genre, which is an addition to prose, poetry and drama.

There are many social issues raised in literary works, one of which is feminism. Feminism is an awareness of the oppression and exploitation experienced by women, both in the family environment, workplace and in society. Feminism began through a series of resistance movements against patriarchy, social inequality and the role of capitalism in the oppression of women (Raina, 2017). Feminism as a social issue that is often raised in literary works, including in movie adaptations, is closely related to various forms of oppression against women, one of which is through the cultural construction of beauty.

Women and beauty are a unity that cannot be separated since dawn the time (Lenge et al., 2023). Cultural constructions of beauty are often a subtle but effective tool of control in oppressing women. Beauty ideals are subjective and socially constructed, influenced by historical context, cultural values, and media representation (George, 2024). Women are encouraged to adhere to certain beauty standards, such as having an ideal body, fair skin, or a perfect face, with the promise that meeting these standards will bring happiness, love, or success. By depicting beauty as an attribute that is essential to a woman's identity, this myth creates pressure for women to constantly strive to achieve unrealistic beauty standards. However, behind that, these beauty standards often limit women, distracting them from other potential such as intellectual development, career, or personal freedom. This is what is called a beauty myth.

Beauty myth is a form of social control that aims to limit women's freedom in ways that appear "natural" and unquestioned. Wolf states that the more legal and material barriers that women successfully penetrate, the tighter, heavier and crueler the image of female beauty becomes (2002, p. 10). In other words, control that previously existed in an external

form now enters the internal realm, through an obsession with appearance. This subtle form of control is related to hegemony. According to Gramsci (in Simon, 1999) hegemony is an organization of consensus, where obedience is created through the domination of ideology by the ruling class. In this case, the beauty myth is part of this process, because the dominant ideology constructs and reinforces standards of beauty as something natural and desirable, which causes women to internalize these ideals and regulate their own behavior to conform. This action highlights how these standards appear as something natural, making it difficult for individuals to recognize them as a means of control. Women are subtly led to believe that beauty is central to their identity, which shifts their focus to achieving these standards rather than questioning the structural inequalities that perpetuate them.

The theory of beauty myths by Naomi Wolf consists of six aspects. The following are aspects of the beauty myth:

1. Work

The concept of Professional Beauty Qualification (PBQ) is increasingly becoming an accepted requirement in the world of work, especially for women. The PBQ reinforces the double standard. Women have always been paid less than men for equal work, and the PBQ gives that double standard a new rationale where the old rationale is illegal (Wolf, 2002, p.48). This shows that expectations for women's physical appearance are much greater, with higher standards of beauty encompassing a range of physical and social aspects, which often disadvantage women in terms of job recruitment and promotion.

2. Culture

Culture creates stereotypes of women that conform to the beauty myth, thereby limiting them to two choices: beauty without intelligence, or intelligence without beauty. In masculine cultures, women who are intelligent are often considered less attractive, and conversely, women who are less intelligent are seen as more attractive (Wolf, 2002, p.58). In women's culture, many works attempt to challenge this myth to reach a deeper meaning of beauty and happiness.

3. Religion

The magazines transmit the beauty myth as the gospel of a new religion (Wolf, 2002, p.86). Beauty myth create new ideologies that shape beauty rituals for women. These rituals control the mind to create new beliefs that can spread like missionary movements of the past. In this case, women's magazines play an important role as "sacred texts" and convey beauty

myth that are treated like dogma. Through this construction, beauty becomes a kind of new "god" for women, which becomes the ideal standard of appearance in society.

4. Sex

According to Wolf (2002, p.132) the beauty myth attacked women simultaneously and as a backlash against the second wave and its sexual revolution, to cause widespread oppression of women's true sexuality. Women's sexuality is often interpreted negatively or even constructed negatively. Women look down on themselves and see a glimpse of themselves in the eyes of men. Along with the emergence of women's magazines, pornographic magazines also emerged that discussed pornography and sadomasochism which had a negative impact on women.

5. Hunger

Wolf stated that under the beauty myth, now all women's diets are a public issue, our food portions become witnesses and reinforce our social inferiority. The beauty myth that is increasingly attached to all women makes women do whatever it takes to satisfy their desire to be "beautiful". The ingrained beauty myth and the belief in social rules attached to it are what women must do to achieve perfect "beauty" in a society where women have no control over their own bodies. If a woman is fat then she will feel guilty about it. A thin body is not a personal aesthetic, but rather a woman's desire to gain the social approval that society demands (Wolf, 2002, p. 189).

6. Violence

Hunger makes women's bodies hurt them, and makes women hurt their bodies (Wolf, 2002, p.218). Plastic surgery provides a new definition of health used by feminists. Health in the new sense offered by cosmetic surgery is beauty, and everything sold by Cosmetic Surgery seems to be health. Suffering and pain become "beauty". In addition, magazines also exacerbate this problem and continue to carry advertisements that encourage women to have cosmetic surgery. The beauty myth not only causes physical violence but also causes women to suffer from mental illness.

Meanwhile, hegemony by Antonio Gramsci can be done in two ways, namely as follows:

1. Consent

Hegemony is a relation, not of domination by means of force, but of consent by means of political and ideological leadership. It is the organization of consent (Simon, 1999). Domination obtained in this way is not through coercion, but rather by spreading ideology, values, and norms that make subordinate groups regard these values as something natural. In this way, hegemony makes domination appear natural because society has accepted the rules of the game created by the dominant class as normal.

2. Coercion

Hegemony according to Gramsci emphasizes that power and legitimacy are interrelated, where authority can only survive through a combination of coercion and consent (Smith, 2005). A truly hegemonic state not only uses military force or physical threats such as persecution and murder to control people, but also shapes people's consciousness through social institutions such as education, media and culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative research is used to research the conditions of natural objects, where the researcher is the key instrument (Sugiyono, 2017). In this study, qualitative methodology is suitable to be used because it allows for an in-depth study of the dialogue and narrative of the characters in *Uglies* movie (2024). Data collection was carried out by accessing the *Uglies* movie (2024) available on the Netflix subscription platform and watching the movie repeatedly, intensively, and critically. Then, collecting new data found in visual data and dialogue that are directly or indirectly related to the myth of beauty. After the data was collected, the data was classified into aspects of the myth of beauty and analyzed how the myth of beauty depicted in the movie is used as a tool of hegemony.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Coercion

1.A. Work

Datum 1

David: "Your culture, they trap you in front of screen, you never move"



*Image 1 Tally wants to help David with his work
(Uglies, 55:18-55:25)*

The data above shows how the culture of the city where Tally lived previously only uses technology and focuses on the time when they will be beautiful. The city where Tally lives only focuses on how they want to look until the time comes for them to have surgery, even though they already have a picture of how they want to look. They think that being beautiful is everything, making them only focus on one goal, which is to be beautiful. This causes them to have no time to develop other potentials that exist within themselves. Even as David said, they rarely move because they are focused on existing technology.

The data above also shows how the beauty myth is used as a tool of hegemony carried out through consent. Society accepts the added beauty standards as something normal and desirable without coercion. They do not feel forced to conform to these standards, but culture has instilled the belief that being beautiful is the only important goal. As a result, they do not develop other potentials and are instead trapped in a mindset that prioritizes beauty above all else.

1.B. Culture

Datum 2

Dr. Cable: "For those of you turning 16 today, you are truly on the cusp of a metamorphosis. That change starts with one elegant procedure that will make you perfect both inside and out. You'll be beautiful and free from hatred and discrimination based on the way you look"



*Image 2 Dr. Cable gives a speech to those who will undergo surgery
(Uglies, 05:55-06:24)*

This data shows how culture shapes people's views about what appearance is considered beautiful and meets ideal standards. People who feel this is right justify this surgical procedure as something that must be done because it has become a culture and part of society. Dr. Cable as governor also instilled the idea that if someone was not beautiful then they would be hated and discriminated against because of their appearance. It can also be seen how those who will undergo surgery that day are very excited and cannot wait to undergo the procedure.

The domination that occurs in the data above is based on consent where the public agrees with Dr. Cable about someone having to be beautiful if they want to be free from discrimination. Dr Cable did not directly force them to undergo surgery, but he instilled the ideology that beauty was a condition of social acceptance and freedom from discrimination. They feel this is the right thing and believe that this is the path to a better life so there is no need to question it. If you want to be appreciated and live a better life, you have to be beautiful, that's the thinking that is instilled in society.

1.C. Religion

Datum 5

Tally: "Should I double my left side? Cause my right side is...I...hate it"

Shay: "Symmetry is overrated"

Tally: "No, it's not. It's an indication of health. We're biologically programmed to prefer it"



*Image 5 Tally shows Shay how she wants to look
(Uglies, 22:25-22:35)*

The data above shows how Tally feels obsessed with her desire to improve her face to be symmetrical. Tally believes that symmetry is a sign of health and something that almost everyone tends to prefer. Tally's statement refers to the general public belief that a preference for symmetry is considered an indicator of good genetics or reproductive health. Tally's statement that symmetry is an indication of health and is biologically created as desired reflects how beauty myths are treated like religions, with biological claims serving as “dogma” to reinforce their beliefs. Just as religions rely on divine doctrines, beauty myths use “scientific truth” to reinforce their beauty standards, making them seem unquestionable.

In the data above, Tally's belief in symmetry as a sign of health is similar to religious beliefs which view beauty standards as something sacred and natural. This reflects how beauty myths create social levels based on beauty that is accepted without criticism, just as traditional religions create belief systems that regulate behavior and thought. This data shows that beauty myths are used as a tool of hegemony which is carried out through consent where beauty standards have been internalized by women to the point that they become part of their deep beliefs, just as religion influences the way a person views the world.

1.D. Sex

Datum 6

Tally: “I don’t want to be free, I wanna be pretty. I can’t... I can’t”

Shay: “Tally, please”

Tally: “I’m so sick feeling like I’m less than”

Shay: “But you’re not”

Tally: “I want people to see me”



*Image 6 Shay invites Tally to join Smoke
(Uglies, 28:44-29:08)*

The data above shows how beauty standards influence the way women view themselves. When Tally chooses to be beautiful rather than live freely, it shows that the desire to meet beauty standards has overcome self-acceptance. Tally is fed up with feeling not good enough as a result of being compared to the ideal body image that is constantly presented in society. Tally believes that being beautiful is the key to gaining approval and recognition from others, seen in her desire for others to see her. The reason is, women are often forced to associate their self-worth with perfect physical appearance, which is considered a requirement for getting attention, love, or even recognition.

Shay, on the other hand, tries to convince Tally that she is good enough without having to change, but Tally's desperation shows how deeply beauty norms affect women's sense of self-worth. Women often feel that their bodies are the only way to get attention or recognition, that physical beauty, especially sexuality, is everything. This myth pressures women to feel that they have to appear "perfect" in order to be respected or accepted, both socially and sexually. Tally's strong desire to be beautiful is an ideological domination carried out through consent where this is what Tally wants without any coercion. She does have a goal to be beautiful even if it means she is not free. This proves that Tally indeed accepts beauty standards and the procedures she will undergo as something she really wants.

2. Coercion

2.A. Culture

Datum 1

Tally: "What night is it?"

Peris: "I think its casino night"

Tally: "They are having so much fun, not one single person looks awkward or left out or just... isn't smiling. I wish I was there so much it hurts"



*Image 7 Tally and Peris see the fun going on in the city the pretties live in.
(Uglies, 02:39-02.55)*

The data above shows that societal norms shape individuals' views of beauty as a source of happiness and social acceptance. In this scene, Tally expresses envy towards the lives of the "pretties" who are considered symbols of perfection and pleasure in society. This shows how culture often associates individual happiness and value with ideal physical appearance. In the theory of the beauty myth, culture plays a major role in creating and maintaining unrealistic beauty standards, which then internalize feelings of dissatisfaction within individuals. Tally feels discouraged because she has not met these standards and how much she wants to be among the pretties. This reflects how culture uses beauty as a tool to create social exclusion and build hierarchy.

The lives of beautiful people are considered ideal conditions for acceptance and happiness, so people like Tally who have not had surgery feel inferior because they have not yet reached those standards. It also reflects how cultures use beauty as a tool of social control, limiting individual freedom by encouraging them to continually focus on achieving those standards. The data above illustrates how hegemony is carried out through coercion with a culture that creates strong social pressure, making individuals like Tally feel that happiness can only be achieved if they meet society's idealized standards of beauty. This social pressure made Tally think there was no other alternative if she wanted to be happy and accepted other than having the surgery.

2.B. Hunger

Datum 4

Shay: "It's not like the dorm food"

Tally: "Sorry, i've just never had anything so spicy"



*Image 10 Tally tried the food that was in the smoke
(Uglies, 56:18-56:28)*

From the data above it can be seen how access to food is limited by the system. Beauty myths often create ideal body standards, where food and nutritional intake become part of the rules that control women's bodies. Society makes women normalize crash diets and associate food with guilt, which reflects how controlling the body also means controlling the food consumed. Therefore, food in the dormitory has been arranged in a certain way that has been adapted to system standards where the food is considered good and healthy even though this is not necessarily true. This suggests that the system is trying to control the individual's body and consumption patterns.

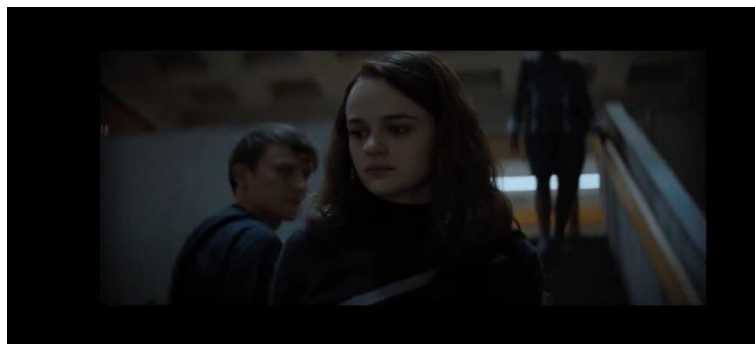
Apart from that, the data above shows how hegemony is implemented through coercion. By controlling what food must be consumed by individuals in the dorm, it shows that there is a dominant system that controls food intake and those there do not have complete freedom to choose what food they will eat. Tally has even hacked or broken rules to be able to eat food according to her wishes. This system becomes a form of hegemonic control that is implemented through strict rules that force individuals to conform, although indirectly.

2.C. Violence

Datum

Girl 1: "Hey, look who's here. Why is she back?"

Girl 2: "She's gonna be here forever" (laughing)



*Image 11 Tally returns to the dorm because the surgery failed
(Uglies, 34:01-34:07)*

The data above proves how beauty is very important for women and influences how women perceive themselves. Likewise, Tally failed to carry out the surgery she had been waiting for a long time. Failing to carry out the surgery would make Tally feel discriminated against in the city. She will forever be “Uglies”. The things she had wanted to do when she was a "pretties" suddenly disappeared because she failed to carry out the surge. This puts pressure on Tally and makes Tally look down on herself for failing to be beautiful. The words of the people around her become a boomerang because those who fail to be beautiful will continue to languish in the dorms without being able to experience the facilities that the "pretties" have. People would also look down on Tally for failing to be beautiful. It can be seen how beauty is a benchmark for women to view themselves. Apart from that, society's view of women's appearance is also a pressure. This pressure is a form of hegemony carried out by coercion which limits individuals from making choices.

They have no other choice but to meet existing beauty standards in order to be considered worthy in the eyes of society. Sometimes they even do things that are sometimes detrimental to themselves to achieve these standards, one of which is surgical procedures. A woman will humble herself if she feels she is not beautiful enough. This pressure makes Tally frustrated with her failure. Therefore, the majority of people with mental illness are women, because many things are required of women.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This research explores beauty myths and hegemony which determine how these aspects influence women in understanding and viewing themselves and limit individual freedom regarding beauty standards that are widely accepted by society.

The beauty myth has six aspects which include work, culture, religion, sex, hunger, and violence. Meanwhile, hegemony is carried out in two ways, namely consent and coercion. The data from this research uses Naomi Wolf's beauty myth theory and Gramsci's hegemony found in *Uglies* movie (2024). The data shows *consent: work 1, culture 3, religion 1 and sex 1*. On the other hand, the results of *coercion: culture 3, hunger 1 and violence 3*. In total, 13 data on beauty myths were found in *Uglies* movie (2024).

The dominant aspects of the beauty myth that emerge are *culture* and *violence*. The dominance of cultural aspects occurs because beauty standards in *Uglies* movie (2024) are constructed as something that is normal and accepted by society without needing to be questioned. Apart from culture, aspects of violence also appear a lot in this movie. Aspects of violence appear in the form of social pressure, discrimination, and coercion experienced by characters to comply with existing beauty standards. This pressure and discrimination are the consequences they feel if they do not reach these beauty standards.

This research also found that the hegemony that appears in this movie is carried out more through *coercion* mechanisms than consent. The majority of people in this movie appear to accept beauty standards as something natural and even desire them, without realizing that the government created this standard as the dominant class. They do not realize that the pressure they experience when facing existing beauty standards is part of indirect coercion in the form of social pressure and psychological pressure experienced by the characters. Coercion does not only take the form of physical coercion but can take the form of other things. Therefore, when hegemony cannot be obtained through consent, social pressure is used as a form of coercion so that predetermined beauty standards can be achieved.

Suggestion

The research on *Uglies* movie found a connection between female characters and beauty myths. This research analyzes the beauty myths experienced by female characters in various aspects of daily life. However, due to limitations in this research, suggestions and input are still needed to be able to find new things for research on the same topic and object in the future. Therefore, it is recommended for future researchers to analyze other objects on the same topic in more depth. Apart from that, future researchers can also collaborate on this topic with studies of other sciences, such as

social class, race and capitalism. On the other hand, the focus of research can also be discussed by examining resistance to beauty myths, namely how characters in films or society challenge established beauty standards. Future research could also examine how beauty myths in films are influenced or reinforced by trends on social media. Saran dapat berupa masukan bagi peneliti berikutnya, dapat pula rekomendasi implikatif dari temuan penelitian.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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