

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Rationale

Feminism is an ideology to establish the status of women to be equal to men socially, economically, politically, and educationally. The recent feminist theory in the United States, third-wave feminism, has been used to explain the link of current feminism to the previous waves of feminism, which are the first-wave feminism and second-wave feminism (Genz and Brabon 156). Third-wave feminism allows women to define the term feminism by themselves based on their different identities, beliefs, nationalities, ethnicities, religions, and backgrounds as Genz and Brabon state that feminist theory today has moved further than just “black or white”(156). Rebecca Munford asserts that the third-wave feminists prefer “individual over collective empowerment” (144). In the article “What is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay,” Claire Snyder states that third-wave feminism focuses on equality with men by applying femininity or girl power or girlie culture (341). The discourse of girl power or girlie culture has been widely used since the 1990s when feminine, sexualized, individualistic, and external beauty became another tool of female empowerment, especially among contemporary young women (Bae 28). Girls’ empowerment has been popularized by the media that show an image of girl icons through magazines, movies, and music (Gaunlett 12). The beauty-oriented attitude of girl power provides women freedom to choose their own appearance, style, and fashion regardless of whether it is to attract male attention or fulfill their own pleasure (Bae 30).

One of the processes of beautifying to empower is the decoration of their looks by using beauty products or wearing make-up. Wearing make-up has played a part in many cultures for a very long time. Both men and women have used cosmetics as tools to color, distort, and exaggerate their physical appearances (Peiss 372). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, cosmetics were related to prostitutes who were the biggest consumers and to nightlife and that caused many working-class women to avoid wearing make-up (373). However wearing make-up could be a tool for self-transformation and self-expression as long as women used appropriate products (376). Cosmetics were popularized to ensure that they could make every woman beautiful and perfect appearance would lead to both personal and career success (385). In the early twentieth century, beautifying oneself became diverse in terms of feminine identity as there were different images portrayed in media, such as women's magazines, advertisements and fashion runways (372). People with more attractive appearance tend to be more financially successful and that creates pressure to reach the ideal beauty created by the media in everybody, not specifically in women (Gaunlett 86-87). However, women are more engaged with wearing make-up as Snyder suggests in that make-up is a tool for women to mark themselves as women, not men (341). Baumgardner and Richards note, "Using make up isn't a sign of our sway to the marketplace and the male gaze; it can be sexy, campy, ironic, or simply decorating ourselves without the loaded issues" (341). Wearing make-up is not only a way for women to represent femininity but also a way to identify themselves.

Although female empowerment through external appearance has become more accepted, this concept opposes the conventional patriarchal norms in which women's rights to choose their own appearance are subjugated to meet the pleasure and desire of the male gaze (Bae 30). The images of beautified women, whether as female empowerment or subjugation to male gaze, are widespread in the mass media. Media can be a tool to commercialize and subjugate the female body or a tool to empower women depending on the way femininity is presented (Tsatsou 518).

Popular culture is highly related to our daily life in a dynamic society and the Internet is a pattern and instrument in popular culture (Fedorak 49). The Internet is one of the tools that users use to explore, connect, communicate, express opinions, and even

identify themselves. Many users have created their own blogs, websites, pages, or videos on the Internet to express their opinions and their identity to a public world. YouTube is one of the video-sharing websites where many people can produce videos in the styles and the concepts that they intend to broadcast to public. YouTube can be a social media that reflects current society as there are about one billion viewers watching videos in YouTube every month (“Statistics”). YouTube can represent the identity, cultural background, social background, thoughts, beliefs, and gender roles of video makers.

One type of a well-known video is a beauty video produced or filmed by people who proclaim themselves as “beauty gurus.” These online areas allow beauty gurus to produce especially beauty videos on how to wear makeup in different situations, including in daily life, in the workplace, or on special occasions. Such videos are also called “haul,” which is mainly to show new makeup items or clothes that they just bought. These videos aim to share and interact with viewers, and, consequently, the viewers tend to follow the gurus and buy the same things as gurus do. Well-known gurus who have more than 1,000,000 subscribers following their channels are like celebrities and they have a lot of impact on the beauty industry. Many cosmetic brands in America try to provide their products to beauty gurus on YouTube in order to create a new channel to promote their products (McDougall, par. 1). Unlike other mass media, in which women are always portrayed in different images, YouTube beauty videos filmed by beauty gurus are one of the ways to represent themselves because their messages in the videos suggest how they feel about themselves after they create their looks by using those beauty products in each video and how they locate themselves in modern society (Murray, par. 3). However, Tsatsou argues that while the Internet provides women with the freedom to embrace girl power as a tool to empower themselves, it might also reproduce an image of the female as an object of the male power gaze in the conventional patriarchal norm (520).

This study aims to explore whether the image of women in YouTube beauty videos is female empowerment or subjugation. It will investigate whether the images of women portrayed in YouTube beauty videos are female empowerment or subjugation to

the male gaze through visual analysis, including camera angles, lighting, and settings, and content analysis, focusing on communicating messages.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

To explore whether the images of women portrayed in YouTube beauty videos represent female empowerment through beautifying practices or subjugation to the male gaze.

## **1.3 Main Research Question**

Do the images of women portrayed in YouTube beauty videos represent female empowerment or subjugation?

## **1.4 Sub Research Questions**

1.4.1 What are beauty videos and how do they affect viewers?

1.4.2 How does make-up represent the identity of women?

1.4.3 Can make-up reflect the identity of a woman?

1.4.4 Does make-up empower or subjugate women?

1.4.5 What are the dominant messages of beauty videos on YouTube?

## **1.5 Education/Application Advantages**

It is hoped that this study will provide a better understanding of the current status of women in popular culture where media has great influence on people's daily lives. Moreover, this research can serve as an example for future research on the role of women in the age of the Internet as it becomes an important channel of communication throughout the world.

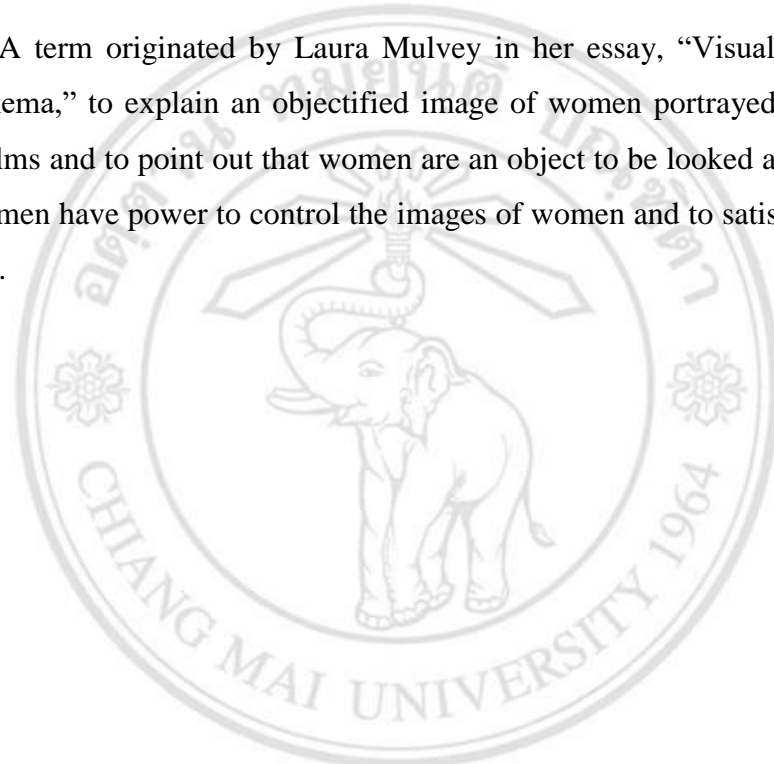
## **1.6 Definitions of Terminology**

**Female Subjugation:** An act of treating female individuals based on appearance as an object or an instrument of desire and visual pleasure to the male gaze.

**Freedom of Choice:** The ability of women to make autonomous choices about self-expression, including how to dress, act, talk, and express themselves, as a challenge to objectification.

**Democratization of Beauty:** A transition when an ordinary woman can achieve celebrated beauty or when a marginal woman can come closer to the center with more accessible beautifying practices and broadened representation.

**Male Gaze:** A term originated by Laura Mulvey in her essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” to explain an objectified image of women portrayed in traditional Hollywood films and to point out that women are an object to be looked at and for male desire, while men have power to control the images of women and to satisfy themselves from the gaze.



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