Self-Representation among Dark-Skinned Individuals on the Discourse of Beauty

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Abstract
This article will explore how dark-skinned individuals perceive their skin color and whether they categorize their appearance as beautiful or ugly. Until recently, the dominant perception of beauty in Indonesia was represented by fair-skinned people, and this fact is strongly related to an individual’s identity. Dark skin is considered less beautiful. However, some individuals attempt to counteract the dominant beauty discourse. Previous literature studies found two reasons that support the counter-discourse toward beauty: recognition and negotiation. Recognition is an act of countering the mainstream discourse, while negotiation is an attempt to contest one’s identity based on their skin. This article argues that women can counter the dominant discourse based on negotiation, because individuals have free choice, body autonomy, and bargaining power. This article is written based on a qualitative research, with in-depth interviews conducted with nine female informants who have attempted to counter the mainstream beauty discourse.

Keywords: self-representation; identity negotiation; dark-skinned; counter-discourse; beauty discours
INTRODUCTION

Self-representation among dark-skinned individuals should be regarded as a form of counter-discourse against mainstream standards of beauty. Womanhood is inseparable from beauty standards in society. Until recently, the discourse on beauty among most Asian women, including Indonesians, was associated with clear white skin, long hair, and the tall figure of the female body. Skin whitening products are ranked as the highest sold beauty products in Indonesia (Saraswati 2012), as well as in other Asian countries, such as India (Sinha in Parameswaran and Cardoza 2009). These facts show that there is a relationship between the mainstream beauty discourse and womanhood. There are women who consciously accept and adapt themselves to mainstream beauty standards. Some people even shape themselves to fit into beauty standards.

The way individuals perceive skin tone depends on how they channel their self-representation. This is known as identity negotiation (Swann Jr. and Bosson 2008). Although some individuals desire white skin, they confidently represent their identity as contrary to prevailing beauty standards. This confident self-image can be defined as a form of counter-discourse against the mainstream discourse of beauty. According to Black (in Millard (2009), each person defines beauty differently. This refusal act can be executed at a group level, such as through media advertisement campaigns. For example: (1) The Dove with Real Beauty campaign promotes women to embrace their own bodies, (2) the new design of Barbie dolls includes various skin tones and body shapes, and (3) the #unfairandlovely campaign encourages female individuals to be comfortable with their darker skin.

The question is raised: “how does this counter-discourse happen?” This article aims to focus the discussion on the counter beauty discourse as supported by dark-skinned individuals. Lähdesmäki (2013), Moretti (2013), Imam and Bano (2015), Osgood (2006), Florini (2015), Hashmi (2016), and Westerlund (2011) perceived counter-discourse as recognition and as a form of agency. Second, Friberg (2006), Gooder (2010), and Marzouki (2015) perceive negotiation as the cause of counter-discourse. In contrast to previous studies, the author would like to propose that counter-discourse is not limited to one group or collective movement, but instead is an individual act. Two major questions for this paper are: “how do dark-skinned individuals perceive dark-skinned beauty?
Second, how can they counter the mainstream discourse? I argue that people counter the mainstream discourse through negotiation. Black (2004) in Millard (2009) states that each person defines beauty differently; some people prefer to have tanned skin, and some prefer fair skin. Each individual opinion may be different from the collective opinion. One may freely like or dislike certain skin colors according to their individual beauty preferences.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article is written based on a qualitative research approach. In-depth interviews were used to explore the informant’s point of view. They chosen selectively, in particular, women with a dark skin were chosen between 16 and 24 years old who live in the city, specifically, Greater Jakarta. People in this age group are exposed to a huge amount of Internet usage, spending an average of more than 27 hours a week online (Anderson 2015). Furthermore, since there was a rising trend in beauty and personal care products for teenagers in 2014 (Euro Monitor International 2017; WHO), we can assume that teenagers are the group of individuals most affected by the discourse on popular beauty. Nine persons were interviewed and their education levels can be divided into two: university graduates (Bachelor’s degree holders) and undergraduates.

![Figure 1. Fitzpatrick’s Skin Type Scale](http://www.realmenrealstyle.com/5-truths-black-men-style/)

1classification of skin tones will rely on Fitzpatrick’s skin type scale, which classifies skin tones into six parts. Based on these parts, I will divide it into two categories: parts one to three as “white” skin and parts four to six as “dark” skin.

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SELF-REPRESENTATION

Hall (1997) described representation as a product of the concept of meaning in our minds through language.\(^3\) Signs are represented in term of words, sounds, or images which carry a designated meaning. In accordance with Hall, Foucault (in Puryanti 2004) described representation as a process where cultural actors used language to create meaning. Also, Leve (2012) described representation as a process through which things and hence meanings are constituted. Puryanti (2004) explains that there are two important aspects of representation: the representative and the represented. Representation has the power to show what an actor wants to show based on their perception. To represent meaning and concept, we need to agree on a shared language. A shared language is made through the construction of meaning by associating certain concepts and ideas with words, sounds or images.

When it comes to body image, problems occur around self-identity and self-image when one experiences one’s body as different from what is represented in the media as desirable (Bolsover 2011). Brewer and Gardner (1996) describe three levels of self-representation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Analysis</th>
<th>Self-Concept</th>
<th>Basic of Self-evaluation</th>
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<th>Basic Social Motivation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Traits</td>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<td>Group</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Group prototype</td>
<td>Intergroup comparison</td>
<td>Collective welfare</td>
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Source: Brewer and Gardner (1996)

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION

Identity is knowing who we are, who others are, and having others the human world, including us as individuals or as part of a group

\(^3\)He explained this through a simple explanation: you can think about a glass even the glass is not physically there, therefore you can think about a concept of glass. You cannot speak to glass, but you can only speak with the “glass” word, as an object out of which you drink your water.
(Jenkins 2008). Quoting Goffman (1969) on Jenkins (2008), people negotiate their identity through interactions, and they present their identity to other people for acceptance. Identity negotiation itself is a process where people can change or maintain their identities (Swann Jr and Bosson 2008). Foucault (1926) in Back (2012) explained two types of identities that describe body and self. In the first, the subject is under someone else’s control; in the second, the individual is using their own moral consciousness and self-knowledge of the subject. To summarize, Foucault’s idea is based on the thought that people are shaped by discourses, which form differently based on someone’s experiences (Hall and Gay 1996). Quoting Sarup (1996) in Chusjairi (2005), there are two points of view related to identity. First, identity can be socially constructed or given, such as race or gender. Second, identity is flexible and is constructed in a process; therefore, both psychological and sociological factors need to be considered. Identity happens based on the interaction between individuals and other institutions such as family, school, media, etc. (Coleman in Chusjairi 2005).

Throughout his book, Jenkins (2008) explains three orders about the world as constructed and experienced by humans. First, the individual order is the human world as made up of individuals and their unique mindsets. Although every individual is unique, selfhood is socially constructed through interactions. Second, the interaction order is how the human world builds up relationships among people. In this part, Jenkins cites Goffman’s theory about impression management; people face both self-image and public image. In addition, every individual identifies others and is also identified by others. Third, the institutional order represents the human world as form of pattern, organization, and institutionalized order. Barth, an anthropologist, offers new insight about collective identification. Every identity must be accepted by others before it can be “accepted,” so identifications must be found and negotiated in groups between their internal interactions.4

4Related to Jenkins (2008) idea about three orders, beauty discourse can be explained through these orders. In the first order, sometimes they have been constructed about beauty value, such as having fair skin, tall in height, or even long, straight hair. Second, discourse about beauty is legitimated through interactions, whether from family or peers. This process is not only limited to value implementation about beauty since they were little, but also it can be conversation or gestures which shows how important it is to have fair skin. Lastly, in third order, these values are being legalized through other institutions, such as the media through advertisements or magazines. These processes then shaped people’s identity.
COUNTER-DISCOURSE

Discourse regarding to Foucault is a term used by dominant groups who establish “truth” through certain values or knowledges (Tiffin 1989). Then, counter-discourse is a term Foucault explains as an act to counter the domination of general authoritative discourse (Moussa and Scapp 1996). In this article, the counter-discourse term is used to call out rejection of the mainstream or dominant beauty concept in society that is adopted by people through cultural products or media. But the counter-discourse act does not come out of the blue. The actor needs power. Foucault (Brooks 1997) explained that an actor can express power through institutions such as education, work, or law to discipline the body, mind, and emotions. Negotiation is not only based on the possession of power, but also on the deployment of the power itself. Foucault also explained that power can result in resistance, struggle, and change. In this topic, resistance means to produce new discourses or new truths, or what he calls counter discourses. The freedom every individual has comes from our ability to understanding ourselves and be dominant enough to reject or refuse something that has already been classified and identified by dominant discourses.

HOW DARK-SKINNED INDIVIDUALS PERCEIVE THEIR SKIN

This article found two categories of opinions among its informants regarding the perceptions of the color of their skin: beautiful and ugly. Some informants perceive their skin color as good thing and say that beauty is not only limited to fair-skinned women, because in fact there are many tan or dark-skinned individuals who are gorgeous as well as confident in their own skin. To them, personality is far more important than appearance. They believe that having a negative personality can make you ugly, even if you have fair skin. They believe that you can have dark skin and a positive personality and be categorized as beautiful. Informants also stated that the most important thing besides personality is being clean. You are beautiful as long as you are clean, even if you are dark-skinned, and vice versa. They believe that beauty is not limited to

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5There are nine informants who were being interviewed and for confidentiality, I will use aliases to name them: S, D, Y, F, P, N, A, Z and V. Only F and P perceive their dark skin as ugly, while the rest perceive it as beautiful.
your skin tone. Some informants also said that they perceive tan skin as exotic and more sexually appealing compared to fair skin.

Dark-skinned people are exotic. There are many people who have dark skin but still look beautiful. She nailed and matched with her dark skin; if she had fair skin she’d probably be ugly, such as Kimmy Jayanti [Indonesian model who have dark or tan skin]. I can’t imagine her having fair skin because she nailed her skin as exotic tan skin. (D, 22 years old)

Some informants reported perceiving dark-skinned people as ugly. One informant, D, said she was rejected as brand ambassador when she was in high school because of her dark skin. Even though she had the ability, she lost against another friend with fair skin; this caused her to see dark skin as a negative thing when she was in high school. Another informant, F, who still perceives dark skin as ugly, said that having fair skin is like “stepping on the save line” because you cannot go wrong if you have fair skin. Fair-skinned women also tend to not be confused by fashion, in contrast with dark-skinned women. Most informants, including those who perceive their skin as beautiful, said that they still have problems with mixing and matching in fashion, because some colors clash with their skin and make them look darker. Informants stated that even if they already embrace and are proud of their skin, they try to maintain their skin so that it does not look even darker, and mixing colors in their clothing is one of their methods. So, F sees the need to have white skin to “save herself.” Also, one informant who perceives dark skin as ugly said that seeing people with fair skin is better than seeing dark-skinned individuals. She refers to her often glancing at classmates just because they have fair skin. To her, fair-skinned people also seem cleaner than dark-skinned individuals.

How individuals perceive their skin is more or less influenced by other actors, such as public figures, peer groups, or family members. Even when an individual has their own mindset and internal factors, other actors’ roles cannot be underestimated. In one’s peer group, there are typically information or values exchanges, and one of these is desirable skin tones. Another informant, D, explained how having fair-skinned friends made her believe that fair skin is more beautiful, especially when her friends were very concerned about their skin and their appearance in general. Another informant, P, as quoted above,
explained that she perceived her skin as ugly because it looks dull. She wanted to have a good impression on her friends and formal relatives. This is what Goffman (1959) and Ritzer (2011) call impression management, a condition where an actor wants to present a certain sense of self to other people so that they define the actor in a particular way. But because a good impression means having fair skin, her opinion about skin tone is influenced by other actors, meaning her peer group. Also, peer groups can internalize desired skin tone by judging others. Three informants said that they were being mocked because of their dark skin. They were called an “item” (hitam/black). D also said that the role of her peer group is even higher than the media in shaping her thoughts and identities.

While with family, value exchanges happen through conversations or actions which imply or push the notion that having fair skin is better than dark skin. One informant’s aunt told her that women’s skin should be protected and maintained because having white skin is better. Another informant received body masks from her mother to make her skin lighter. This is also relevant to Jenkins’ second statement, that every individual judges others and is also judged by them. He also said that human world was built on relationships among people. Goffman (1969) and Jenkins (2008) also stated that people could negotiate their identity through interaction. Here dark-skinned individuals are identified as “dark people” or as an “item” by being labeled by other people such as friends or family. Identities can be shaped based on those labels and interactions based on the labels. The individual must decide whether to agree with the discourse or counter it.

Media has a huge influence in shaping dark-skinned individuals’ identities through public figures and advertisements. Informants mentioned many names, including Rihanna, Jourdan Dunn, Tara Basro, Shafira Umm, Kimmy Jayanti, Lia Waode, Prisia Nasution, Anggun Cipta Sasmi, Nadine Waworuntu, Uli Aulia, Sarah Sechan, Atiqah Hasiholan, and Kelly Tandiono as public figures who made them feel good about their own skin tones, because they have seen with their own eyes that beauty or being gorgeous does not have anything to do with having fair skin. Some informants said seeing public figures really helped them because they were proof that having dark skin is fine, too, allowing them to start to embrace their own skin color.

Public figures can change dark-skinned individuals’ perceptions about their skin through their confidence in having dark skin. This
is also consistent with data from the interviews. Informants reported becoming more confident because of seeing public figures being confident and embracing their dark skin. One informant said that seeing dark-skinned public figures is good for her, because they can act as her role models in learning to embrace their skin color and also in knowing how to maintain it. The Internet also has huge role because it is a socialization channel; for example, how dark-skinned public figures use media to post their photos. Take Tara Basro, an Indonesian actress and model. As one example, she posted a photo which shows her dark skin, and Netizen commented that they love her skin because it is exotic, sexy, and has a very Indonesian skin tone, all of which are positive things. In addition to the Internet, advertisements also have a huge role in what people think. Through advertisements in magazines or on television, the discourse about skin color could be strengthened.

Advertisements are easily consumed by society, and through globalization, they spread across many countries easily, with little modification (Frith et al. 2005). Advertisements using bias for fair-skinned people made those who saw it want to have fair skin. Deleuze and Guattari (in Saraswati 2010) explained it as facialization or an abstract machine of reality which says that our faces represent our bodies; therefore, the model chosen for an advertisement plays a huge role in setting the standards for what people think is beautiful. Media often reinforces beauty ideals and socializes them, and then it is used by individuals when judging others (Levine and Harrison in Swami et al. 2010). This is also linked with other actors, such as family or peer group. Judging people could be by peer group or by family with labeling dark-skinned individuals, because they too internalize standard beauty discourse. This also aligns with Jenkins’ third order, which says that our world is shaped through organizations. Product companies use their advertisement campaigns to shape skin color bias, especially when it comes to skin care products. Many products, including makeup, skincare, and household use fair-skinned people as their models, and the result was consumed by millions of people who then internalized that beauty relates only to fair-skinned people. That is how institutionalized order shapes our world.

However, eventhough there are external factors which help shape individuals’ mindsets, such as media, family, and peer group socialization, it is also true that internal factors such as an individual’s mindset also play a huge role here. Jenkins also stated about the first
order that the human world is made up by our mindset. Through another media trigger, dark-skinned individuals have started to accept and embrace their skin. They have seen dark-skinned public figures who look good and are still fashionable; also, they started to think that beauty is not limited to fair skin, but also includes dark-skinned individuals. For them, having the feeling of confidence that comes from within is the most important thing. Also, some informants already had positive mindsets about their skin because for them, beauty is not reflected only through skin colors, but through one’s personality. This is also related to Hall and Gay (1996), who said that our identities are constructed within ourselves.

How someone perceives their skin is related to their identity, because identity is a multi-dimensional classification of the human world (Jenkins 2008). Foucault (in Back 2012) also explained about how we can be subject to someone else’s control. Even though we are being shaped by discourses, we still question our true selves. Almost everyone lives under the media holder’s control. They have the ability to shape every value they want through every channel they have, including television, newspapers, magazines, and advertisements. But as individuals, we have our moral consciousness and self-knowledge, which Foucault explains as the reason we question ourselves through identity negotiation.

Thus, there are several reasons why an individual could gain confidence about their skin. First, because she looked to other people as her role models. Through seeing other people or public figures who embrace their skin, it might encourage someone to also embrace their own skin. Second, because she has bargaining tools she perceives as her “excess,” such as skills and personality. Some informants explained that it was fine for them to have darkskin and be different from the standard beauty discourse as long as they are smarter than their peers or if they already have friends who do not complain about their skin. The next sub-topic discusses bargaining power more.

SELF-REPRESENTATION AMONG DARK-SKINNED INDIVIDUALS

Informants represented their skin in different ways. D represented her skin as looking like Tara Basro and Kimmy Jayanti’s; also, S and V represented their skin as exotic because of its color. The images of both Tara and Kimmy’s skin are good, because she mentioned those names
several times during her interview. She said that she adores their skin and she could not imagine them with fair skin because she thinks that both of them are beautiful in their own way. She also expressed her belief that understanding Tara and Kimmy’s skin image really helped her shape her own identity and self-representation toward her own skin. D also believed that both Tara and Kimmy’s skin, as well as her own, were an exotic color. This is also in tune with S and V’s opinions about their skin.

Hall (1997) describes words, sounds or images which carry meaning as a sign. In this case, the sign is an exotic and sexy concept. Informants often linked their skin color with being exotic or sexy. Also, exotic or sexy sometimes connected with being thought of as beautiful. Some informants said that dark-skinned individuals are beautiful, sexy, and exotic, especially after seeing dark-skinned public figures who embrace their skin color. Those words are meaningful because they can make informants proud of their skin. Here is a quote from the interview with D, who perceived her skin as sexy and exotic:

When the world changes and shows beauty is no longer only linked with fair skin people, I would be very confident and probably make myself to get sun exposure more to be tanner. (D, 22 years old)

According to Hall’s concept, their representation is giving meaning to their skin color, which they consider as sexy or exotic. Every informant who perceived their skin as beautiful admitted that they represented their skin color as sexy and exotic. Representation in the circuit of culture focuses on the process of finding meaning. By finding positive meanings about their skin, they find other aspects such as self-consciousness and bargaining power. Hence, they shape their identity which perceives dark skin as beautiful. Then, they identified their skin color as beautiful. This process can also be stated as a counter-discourse process. But whether they identified their skin as sexy or not depends on the individual. Out of all informants who perceive their skin tone as beautiful, only one already felt like her skin was sexy or exotic. However, some already thought that their skin color was sexy, but that their particular skin conditions did not make them feel sexy or exotic. Some informants explained that they could not categorize their skin as sexy or exotic because their skin was dry and not glowing like they see in
several public figures with glowing and healthy tan skin. They already embrace their own skin color, but not yet the condition of their skin.

Based on Hall (Puryanti 2004) there are two important aspects in representation: the representative and the represented. The representative aspect has the power to show what the actor wants others to perceive. In this topic, representative informants represent their skin as nice, good-looking or as an exotic skin color. Through showing their skin using their positive perception, they represent or channel their power regarding their skin. According to Hall, represented is more focused on what is being represented. In this case, what informants represented is their nice, good-looking or exotic skin color.

How informants represent their skin can relate to their identity as well. Informants with either Bachelor’s degrees or undergraduates could be a sign of their higher education. Through higher education, informants receive broader information or values; therefore, that could shape their mindset about desirable skin tones. D, an informant who graduated from university, stated that because of her educational background, she understood that she did not have to accept the beauty discourse anymore. What she learned is that media could shape your thoughts about who is categorized as beautiful and who is not, but D felt that she was able to counter that discourse.

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION PROCESS FOR DARK-SKINNED INDIVIDUALS

Quoting Sarup (on Chusjairi (2005), there are two points of view regarding identity. First, identity is socially constructed or given, and second, identity is flexible and can be shaped. Identity happens based on interactions between individuals and other institutions, such as family, school, and media, for example (Coleman in Chusjairi 2005). For dark-skinned individuals, their identity is based on their skin color. Their identities can also be changed and manageable because there are some socialization factors available, such as through family, media, peers or school. Their manageable identity can be explained through identity negotiation.

Identity itself is related to knowing who we are, who others are, others knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on (Jenkins 2008). The identity they wanted to change was by making themselves look fairer and more beautiful, because having fair skin was
the definition of being beautiful for them. They managed their identity through consuming several products. According to Du Gay (2003), product consumption can affect your identity. Through buying and using a product, you make that product become a part of you. As an example of an informant who still accepts the discourse, P gave the example of a face whitening product that she bought two years ago and has continued to repurchase, so it became part of her. She loves the result: her skin is brighter and fairer. Even though she said that she has been using face whitening product for her self-pleasure, she did not reject the idea that she loves when she hears people say she looks fairer. To be seen as fairer became part of her identity, because identity is about knowing who we are and others knowing who we are.

Based on the data findings, half of informants said that they are confident with their own skin tones regardless of product use. But they also did not reject the fact that they used to be ashamed of their own skin. At one time, they were very confident with their own skin, but as time went by, they felt ashamed about it and perceived dark skin as a negative thing. There are many reasons, such as being mocked and labeled as “item” or as a black kid by peers and family, having friends who pay huge attention to their appearance, or being told by their families about how important it is to have fair skin. There are two informants who admitted they have nicknames among their peers as “item.” Surprisingly, the names come from people in their inner circle. Even though they did not directly admit that they were offended, they started to wonder if people were recognizing them based on appearance, not just personality. Not only that, but media also socializes fair skin as more beautiful than dark skin; therefore, they felt ashamed.

Dark-skinned individuals can also perceive their skin as a negative thing because of peers, family, or media. But as time goes by, they start to embrace their own skin. There are many reasons behind this: public figures with dark skin still look good; their own self-awareness tells them that beauty cannot only be categorized as having fair skin. These processes indicate that they do negotiate their identity from accepting the counter-discourse, or vice versa. Identity negotiation is a process in which people change or maintain their identities (Swann Jr and Bosson 2008). Identity as described in this section is knowing who we are or knowing ourselves, just like what Jenkins (2008) said. Goffman in Jenkins (2008) also explained that people negotiate their
identity through interactions, and that was shown using the following data.

Figure 2. Identity Negotiation Process Among Dark-Skinned Individuals

Being labeled as “item” through interactions between informants and their peers stimulated the process of negotiation to counter the dominant standards. Before being labeled as “item,” they were fine, proud, and did not have any problem with their skin, which is one example of counter-discourse. One discourse in beauty is that fair skin is more beautiful and better than darkskin; yet they remain proud of their own skin. But after being labeled, they negotiated their identity and started to accept the discourse. Informants did many things after accepting and perpetuating the standard beauty discourse, such as using whitening cream or avoiding skin-darkening sun exposure.

Another informant, P, perceives her darkskin as ugly. She used to counter the discourse, but then she accepted the discourse itself. For her, darkskin means dull skin; therefore, she perceives it as a negative attribute. She started to accept the discourse when she realized that she had to manage relationships with many people in the future, whether as friends or as business colleagues. She wants to look neat and clean, yet her skin is in contrast with her wishes. From the quote above, P did impression management. This is also relevant to Jenkins’ second interaction, which says that every individual judges others and is also being judged by them. He also said that human world was built in relationships among people. In this moment, P wants to manage her self-representation by doing impression management on other people through identity negotiation. She wants to manage herself as well as possible with being clean, but for her, being clean means having white skin. Therefore, she wants to have white skin. The process she followed was to accept the discourse and use a face-whitening product.
COUNTER-DISCUSSSCE PROCESS AMONG DARK-SKINNED INDIVIDUALS

Based on the interviews, there are seven informants who successfully countered the standard discourse. In this article, counter-discourse is used to call out rejection of mainstream or dominant beauty concepts in society which are adopted by people through cultural products or media. These informants have good self-representation about their skin; they have negotiated their identity and countered the discourse. But the process toward counter-discourse did not come out of blue. Foucault explains that an actor needs power to counter the discourse. These informants have something called bargaining power. Most said that it related to their personality; therefore, they felt it was part of their power because it did help them to become confident with their skin. D explained that she had a lot of friends and had no problem with her boyfriend regarding her as dark-skinned. She also was asked to teach her friends. Another informant, Y, also said that her defensive thinking regarding her skin was bargaining power. She said that she was tired of other people’s opinions, so she chose to wear and embrace her dark skin instead. She also said that thinking about how she did not have to be scared of going outside because she already had darkskin worked for her everytime she felt less confident.

Informants said that having bargaining power really helped them to counter the discourse itself because having power made them braver and stronger. Y also explained that her defensive act, which became her power, was based on her assumption that having darkskin is not a shortage that you need to cover with another advantage. Foucault also explained that negotiation in society is not only based on the possession of power, but also the deployment of power. In this context, the power is not only in the hand of policy makers or media companies, but it is in every person’s hands. An individual person can have bargaining power as their power, too. Along with the power, people can bring resistance, struggle, or change. Foucault also explained that resistance means producing new discourses or new truths. D said her skills, her condition of still having a lot of friends and a boyfriend were her bargaining power, because they really help make her feel confident about her skin. S, an informant, also said that her bargaining power was having a lot of friends and a good attitude. Those powers helped D and S resist the standard discourse and
gave them a reason to counter it. Thus, bargaining power can be a tool for achieving successful counter-discourse.

There are several reasons behind the bargaining process itself. First, it describes the point at which the informant feels that their “excess” is better than their “shortage.” In this case, one informant described her excess as her skills and personality. An informant, D, said that she was one of the smart students in her class and that one of her skills is being able to teach her friends; her skin color did not matter to her friends. Second, it could be called a bargaining process if the individual or informant perceives their skill or personality as a tool. Without ascribing importance to their skill or personality, the bargaining process would not work. Third, it can be a bargaining process if an individual perceives the bargaining tool as more important than her skin color. D could have bargaining power because she perceived being smart as far better than having fair skin; thus, her skills were her bargaining tools. Lastly, if it can be validated by others, it can be a bargaining tool. Without any validation, the bargaining process would not work. This is also related to identity, because identity focuses on how people perceive us. Jenkins’ third order is the world as a form of pattern and organization. Every identity must be accepted by others before it can be “accepted,” so identifications can be found and negotiated in groups by their internal interactions. D also received validation from her friends about her teaching skills, so it was her bargaining tool.

In this context, D and Y both did what Foucault called a counter-discourse. This action was also done with another three informants who were already confident about their skin. They had their own power and used that as their reason to counter the discourse. Foucault also explained that the freedom every individual has comes from our ability to understand ourselves and our modes of domination, as well as to reject or refuse something that has been classified and identified by dominant discourses. Here, D and Y refused to share the mindset about beauty standards. They chose to be ignorant and defensive and use their power instead. D’s friend skills and Y’s defensive mindset had their own bargaining power because it made them proud of their skin even though their skin was categorized as “ugly”. Their resistance toward the dominant beauty discourse could bring about new discourses (Foucault in Brooks 1997). New discourses can say that beauty should not be dictated by skin color. Another new truth or discourse can be that
beauty is not limited to fair-skinned people only, but that it also applies to dark-skinned individuals.

Brewer and Gardner’s (1996) level of self-representation describe the self-representation process. Informants used self-evaluations for their traits, which also provided them with the bargaining power to form a counter-discourse. D, S, and V used their friendship skills as their bargaining power. Those informants successfully rejected something that had been classified and identified; that is, that fair skin is more beautiful than darkskin. They also proved that they were not being rejected socially, which contradicts Berry’s (2008) statement that if people fail to cope with beauty standards, other people will make them feels excluded or socially rejected. Because, in the end, despite their skin color, those informants could still befriends with anyone or have a boyfriend. They also proved that dominant masculine ideas could be rejected, because, as Hilhorst (2002) explained, physical beauty is not only a cultural construct which ascribes to any body shape, but it is also an expression of dominant masculinity. They projected that beauty should not be classified into categories because in the end, personality is far more important than looks.

A side from their bargaining power, the reason for their counter-discourse act is because of their negotiation. They could negotiate their standard of beauty through their free choice, body autonomy, and also by negotiating their identity. Based on their interviews, S, D, and Y agreed that they did not have to listen to other people’s opinions regarding beauty standards, because it is their body. This shows how they use their body autonomy and free choice to counter the discourse. Body autonomy is an independence you have about your own body, where you enjoy and embrace your own body without listening to what other people say. Informants with good body autonomy had an easier time rejecting the discourse. It was like, “What is your problem with my having darkskin? Even though beauty often relates to fair skin, as long as I am happy, why should I care about your opinion?” They also have free choice because, just like what S said, we can show beauty in our own way without caring about what other people say.

CONCLUSION

To counter the beauty discourse, there are several processes dark-skinned individuals should do, including negotiating their identity and
bargaining power. In negotiating their identity, dark-skinned individuals need both sides: internal and external factors. This is because, as quoted by Sarup (1996) on Chusjairi (2005), identity is flexible and can be shaped in the process. Identity happen based on interactions between individuals and other institutions, such as family, school, and media (Coleman in Chusjairi 2005). But, it also comes from internal factors, such as self-consciousness about desirable skin color.

According to Jenkins (2008), how someone represents and identifies themselves is inseparable from another actor’s role, such as peer group, family or media. Based on the data findings, there are two ways in which informants represent their skin: beautiful and ugly. Informants who represent their skin as beautiful believe that personality is more important than skin color, while informants who perceived their skin as ugly believe that even though personality matters, people will judge you based on your looks. Also, informants who perceive their dark skin as beautiful believe that they embrace their skin color because it is a sexy and exotic color. They represent their skin color as what they believe is sexually appealing.

Regarding the counter-discourse, other than to negotiate it, an individual needs another power such as bargaining power as their reason for countering it. This is also related to Brewer and Gardner’s (1996) concept of self-representation level, where one’s basic self-evaluation is based on traits that become our bargaining power. Some informants said that being smarter than their peers could be their bargaining power, which helps them counter the beauty discourse. For them, being smart is more important than having dark skin.

Figure 3. Counter-Discourse Process

Source: Research findings (processed)

Based on the interviews, two questions are answered. Dark-skinned individuals can perceive their skin as beautiful or ugly. These things were not taken for granted, but arrived at through a process. Eventhough
our identity is constructed within ourselves, other factors also have a role here. To counter the discourse, aside from negotiating, they can also use bargaining power. The argument itself is also answered because counter-discourse here is based on negotiation. Women can negotiate about beauty standards for autonomy and free choice because they have different standards for beauty.

REFERENCES


