


Enabling the Disabled: Negotiation of Beauty in a Disabled Model Instagram Account

(Memberdayakan Penyandang Disabilitas: Negosiasi Kecantikan dalam Akun Instagram Model Penyandang Disabilitas)

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Abstrak

Keberagaman, kesetaraan, dan inklusivitas dalam industri kecantikan semakin tampak melalui meningkatnya popularitas model penyandang disabilitas di media arus utama. Studi ini, yang diambil dari konsep Wolf tentang Mitos Kecantikan, bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana Jillian Mercado—seorang model penyandang disabilitas terkemuka—menggambarkan dan menegosiasikan kecantikan melalui akun Instagramnya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan semiotik, penelitian ini menganalisis konten visual dan tekstual unggahan Instagram Mercado untuk menjelaskan bagaimana ia menegosiasikan standar kecantikan tradisional. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa representasi Mercado menegosiasikan kecantikan ideal yang berlaku dengan merangkul identitasnya sebagai individu penyandang disabilitas dan perannya sebagai model penyandang disabilitas profesional. Lebih lanjut, studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa negosiasi alih-alih penolakan langsung terhadap norma kecantikan konvensional merupakan upaya yang strategis dan disengaja untuk meningkatkan inklusivitas dalam industri kecantikan. Melalui pendekatan ini, Mercado menjembatani kesenjangan antara ekspektasi masyarakat tentang kecantikan dan realitas identitas yang beragam, dengan mendukung representasi dan inklusivitas.

Kata kunci: Instagram, model penyandang disabilitas, negosiasi, pemberdayaan, standar kecantikan

Abstract

Diversity, equity, and inclusivity in the beauty industry are increasingly apparent through the rising popularity of disabled models in mainstream media. This study, drawing from Wolf's concept of the Beauty Myth, aims to reveal how Jillian Mercado—a prominent disabled model—portrays and negotiates beauty through her Instagram account. Using a semiotic approach, this research analyzes the visual and textual content of Mercado's Instagram posts to examine how



she negotiates traditional beauty standards. The findings reveal that Mercado's representation negotiates the prevailing beauty ideals by embracing both her identity as an individual with a disability and her role as a professional disabled model. Furthermore, this study concludes that negotiation, rather than outright rejection, of conventional beauty norms is a strategic and deliberate effort to improve inclusivity within the beauty industry. Through this approach, Mercado bridges the gap between societal expectations of beauty and the realities of diverse identities, endorsing for representation and inclusivity.

Keywords: beauty standards, disabled model, empowerment, Instagram, negotiation

INTRODUCTION

To date, the existence of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on Instagram has played an important role to spread the advertising and promote the brands to their followers through endorsement or paid partnership systems. As a widely used social media platform, Instagram has proven its function to easily connect people all over the world. According to the data from (Statista 2024) showed that in 2023 Instagram users reach up to 1.35 billion people because of its user-friendly interface and capacity for sharing daily life. Since a number of people have used Instagram in their daily life, a lot of marketplaces have used these benefits to increase online advertisement and gain a broad audience.

With the rise of SMIs impacts, it allows users to use the Instagram features from clicking the tagged brand account, swiping up the brand's website, to purchasing the brand items as the final stage of consumer decision making. It happened because the SMIs combine both functional (brand features) and personal (influencers' experience using the product) information on their contents (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo 2021). However, there are still tons of factors that influence the followers to buy the products such as the perceived interest, usefulness, novelty or quality of the influencers' contents.

As the name suggests, Instagram influencers have a significant power to influence people on social media. In order to reach the engagement, particularly among women influencers, many focus on enhancing physical appearance to gain audiences on a broader scale. This often involves efforts to present a pleasing and attractive image to draw attention on social media. As a result, some of them feel enhanced pressure to meet the beauty standards to present themselves as adorable and look great. In general, beauty standards refer to the criteria by which women are expected to meet an ideal physical appearance such as having small waist, long hair, and flawless skin. These criteria are just a few among many others because by referring to this standard, women influencers have a significant impact on shaping followers' interests to their endorsement.

However, while many Instagram influencers possess those beauty standards, disabled models challenged this notion. According to Qoyyum et al. (2023), disabled endorsers have a power to influence people on Instagram because they tend to show a sense of purpose and meaning in life, self-acceptance, and self-confidence in being different. Additionally, they can show their diversity in advertising that is not only possessed by those ideal beautiful influencers.

In various communities, debates have raged regarding the appropriate terminology to refer to people with disabilities. While some may argue that the term "disabled" is widely accepted, others assume it as carrying negative meanings and advocate for alternative terms like "specially-abled," "handicapped individual," and the like. These terms are used to properly address people with disabilities in a respectful language and make them included and valued. Conversely, the use of

disrespectful language towards people with disability may promote exclusion and inequality (NYLN & KASA 2006).

Nevertheless, since this study focuses on Jillian Mercado, a Hispanic model with disability from the US, the term “disabled” is preferred because Jillian Mercado addresses herself as a disabled person to show her identity on her Instagram account. Jillian Mercado is a professional disabled model licensed by Creative Artists Agency (CAA) Fashion that made her name as a model back in 2014. She suffers from Muscular Dystrophy but successfully landed her first ad campaign with Diesel that marked her career in modeling. In addition, she is also an activist who debunked beauty myths within ableists and white-supremacist (Oppenheim 2016).

In the context of beauty standards, disabled people have typically been excluded from discourses related to beauty and physical appearance because it is assumed that they are incapable or unwilling to adhere to societal norms of beauty (Ellis 2016). This is because disabled people are frequently ranked low in the hierarchy of impairments within the disability movement since some are viewed as "better" than others (Parsons, Reichl, & Pedersen 2017).

In relation to this phenomena, it is interesting to see how Naomi Wolf's Beauty Myth operates, or, rather, is adopted. Beauty Myth discusses how beauty is constructed by society and not solely formed naturally. It is the misconception that sees women's worth and meaning based on appearance. The idea of the beauty myth emphasizes how men's perceptions of attractiveness are based on the physical attributes of women (Wolf 2002). When a woman satisfies the physical criteria based on men's perceptions, that woman can be considered beautiful, which in turn creates societal prejudices about particular sorts of women's beauty (Björnsdóttir, Stefánsdóttir, & Stefánsdóttir 2017). Hence, Beauty Myth aims to voice the excluded parties, including the disabled people that are regarded as having no ideal body.

This study aims to reveal how Jillian Mercado portrays and negotiates beauty standards through her Instagram account as a symbol of empowerment. The term negotiating is used to show how Jillian Mercado showcases her, on the one hand, physical appearance as a model, but on the other hand, her disability. Negotiating in this paper refers to the way she, at the same, adopts and debunks beauty stereotypes by negotiating feminine bodily beauty ideals. Therefore, there is a beauty negotiation between the model and the constructed beauty that is stigmatized by society. The existence of Jillian Mercado in the fashion industry challenged the concept of beauty that is commonly believed by society.

METHOD

Descriptive-qualitative is implemented in this study because of the research accuracy and effectiveness of a relatively short time. According to John Creswell, in his book entitled *Qualitative Inquiry Research Design* mentioned that qualitative is designed to seek, understand, and examine the meaning of a social phenomenon within society (Creswell 2009). Thus, it became the bridge to meet the objective and the research need. In addition, it helped the writer to obtain a better analysis of how beauty is negotiated on @jillianmercado Instagram account.

The theory of Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolf is involved that aims to reveal how the model debunks the beauty standards on her Instagram and strengthened by the semiotic of Roland Barthes which serves as a theory to interpret sign and discover the meaning of beauty in a disabled model from those two Instagram photos. Semiotic theory by Roland Barthes is applied because it has a connection with an image rhetoric where the level of denotation elements (non-coded iconic

message) and connotation (iconic coded message) are included in the linguistic message and iconic message. For the linguistic message, it contains anchorage that functions to inform the meaning of visual image while relay aims to deepen the understanding of the visual image. On the other hand, the denotation level of an iconic message belongs to a non-coded iconic message and connotation appears in iconic message. The existence of an image rhetoric aims to assist researchers in understanding the ideological meaning of the image. Moreover, in the Myth level, analyzing these messages enables a relation between the media's ideological meaning into the cultural context (Hamenda 2020).

Population of this data is gathered through the Instagram account of @jillianmercado and the sample is taken from the two photos as the primary data. The photos are selected through purposive sampling, based on criteria such as having most liked photos, showing full body gesture, and highlighting her identity as an individual with disability. Considering that she is primarily attending modeling events, the authors select two photos as the data. Moreover, the secondary data is gathered not only through scientific articles and e-books from reputable journals, but also from trusted sites discussing the same issue. The authors used Naomi Wolf's book entitled *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* to analyze the beauty negotiation represented by Jillian Mercado. Additionally, Roland Barthes's semiotic is implemented along with the discussion to examine the primary data.

Primary and secondary data are playing an essential role to picture the result study. Primary data are taken from @jillianmercado Instagram account by gathering her full-body photos and videos as the general data. The authors set the full-body criterion to gain a deep analysis from Jillian Mercado. Jillian Mercado, on her Instagram @jillianmercado by March 2024 has 180 posts and 38 in full body poses. From that number, the authors will take two photos of her attending modeling event. For the secondary data obtained from articles, the writer initially selects the articles based on several inclusion criteria: (1) articles published in reputable journals, (2) comprising several keywords: beauty standards, beauty myths, disability, women, race, gender, and the like, and (3) written in English.

Since this study raises a topic about disabled models that negotiate the beauty standards, the writer analyzed the two obtained photos from Jillian Mercado from her Instagram account and examined it using Semiotic theory by Roland Barthes. Two steps are applied to obtain a deeper analysis. First step to gain the research result is by examining the photos such as from physical appearance, gesture, color, and environment captured in the photo. The second step is by analyzing the caption to ensure whether it truly represents the facial expression or it has another implied meaning that illustrate the beauty myth's realms, work, religion, culture, hunger, violence, and sexuality depicted in the photo. In this step, the writer will apply the Roland Barthes theory of Semiotic to understand the sign portrayed in the photo. Additionally, the writer also saw the public response from their comments to obtain a datum of how the disabled model models are being viewed.

Moreover, the writer conveyed and explained the research findings to address the problem's statement and interpret it based on the data after performing those steps during the data analysis. The authors also pointed out the importance and relevance of the Beauty Myth in today's disabled model representations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jillian Mercado and Her Modeling Appearance



Figure 1. Jillian Mercado at The Blonds Catwalk New York Fashion Week 2020
(Source: Jillian Mercado Instagram account @jillianmercado (Mercado 2020))

In Instagram post above (Figure 1), Jillian Mercado is depicted in two photos. The first slide showed Jillian Mercado in a full-body shot, capturing her modeling appearance rolling through the Blonds Fall NYFW 2020 runway with her sleek black electric wheelchair. The dazzling gold dress also matches with her headpiece and her brown-toned skin. In the background, seven other models stand at a distance, having done with their runway walks. In the left side of the frame, seated several audiences that attended the event. Moreover, the soft red lighting tone in the event makes the runway a central focus of the event. In the right side, serves the second photograph of Jillian Mercado that was captured in a half-body shot, focusing her presence from a closer look and highlighting her makeup in detail.

1.1 Linguistic Messages

In this photo, posted on February 10th 2020, Jillian Mercado expressed her gratitude for representing a disabled model to participate in a catwalk. Through her captions, she expressed her emotions regarding the obstacles faced by individuals with disabilities that often feel unseen and unheard in a society yet maintain her dreams into a reality, “[...] for the countless of times that we all have shouted for respect and equal representation or for the times other people speak for us, not with us.”

The use of the word “with” on the captions suggest that people with disabilities perceive it differently when people speak for them instead of engaging with them in a conversation. It seems that the discourse about disability is solely a discussion for non-disabled people that makes individuals with disability feel excluded and marginalized. Those captions emphasize a point that disabled communities want to be seen and to have an equal right as non-disabled people.

This moment is brought to you by a young girl looking through magazines-collecting them to the point of basically being a hoarder and watching fashion television while taking notes of how to be the best in the industry-being glamorized by the world of fashion and loving every single moment of what she saw but wondering if she actually belonged. Wondering if they would actually accept her for being exactly who she is, even though she never saw someone who had a visible disability in those magazines or television (Mercado 2020).

In this line, as she mentioned the phrase “the young girl,” she throws back to the moment where she used to collect fashion magazines and watch television programs while imagining herself got featured and standing among those models. Moreover, she mentioned “she never saw someone who had a visible disability” denotes a message that she never sees models with disabilities appear either on magazines or screens and the term “a visible disability” emphasize a message that she was wondering whether she would find someone with a visible disability like her was represented. However, Jillian Mercado apparently realized that the mainstream media rarely showed the presence of disabled individuals in the fashion industry that turned out to be her motivating factor to represent herself as a disabled model in today’s era.

I’ve been through countless wars making sure that this moment was exactly how I imagined through every obstacle you can think of. Determination helped me get to this moment and those who believed in me made sure that it was as perfect as I knew I could be (Mercado 2020).

Furthermore, Jillian Mercado shares her personal journey of negotiating an idea that models must adhere to certain physical beauty standards and cultural norms in a society, evident by the words “imagined,” “countless wars,” and “every obstacle.” Her hard work to bring inclusion and diversity in the fashion world has successfully proven that dreams are not exclusive to certain people, but rather, they belong to everybody in this world. Jillian Mercado also reminds everyone through the phrase “determination helped me get to this moment” meaning that perseverance has been a fuel for those who are willing to pursue their dreams despite all of the uncertainties of being a disabled person.

1.2 Non-Coded Iconic Message

Despite the variety of stage designs available for fashion shows, including X, T, H, F, and I shapes, The Blonds have consistently applied the T-shape configuration over the years to maintain intimacy with audiences. According to Socialtables (2024), the runway with a T-shape is the most frequently used variation in the fashion world to showcase multiple collections with several models lining up at the stage. Even though Figure 1 does not photograph Jillian Mercado moving along the T-shaped runway, the Videofashion YouTube channel showcasing several clips entitled “The Blonds Fall 2020 New York Fashion Week” and revealing the T-shaped stage layout. In addition, the designers of The Blonds New York Fashion Week 2020 mentioned that the runway was a nod to Latin roots as the show featured models and artists from all over Latin America and presented the most inclusive runway as Jillian Mercado was invited to make her runway debut in a cell towered wheelchair.

In Figure 1, Jillian Mercado is depicted in two photo slides at The Blonds New York Fashion Week Catwalk, wearing a dazzled bodysuit and matching headpiece. The dress seems a bit transparent in the upper chest and shows Jillian Mercado’s body skin. The photo portrayed her in a wheelchair rolling in a runway with her eyes not looking at the camera and looking serious. She is also wearing make-up and red high heels that make her more radiant with her appearance. In the background, there are eight models that also participate at the runway.

On the second slide, there is not much difference with the previous slide because the difference primarily lies in the framing. The first picture showed Jillian Mercado in a full-body pose encompassing her surroundings including the audience and the several models in the background. Meanwhile, the second photo is more closed up with the focus only on Jillian Mercado and her details that make her the main attention.

1.3 Coded Iconic Messages

Figure 1 portrays Jillian Mercado with a detailed attention to her make up and showcases a professional outlook as a model. Her flawless make up seems to demonstrate a message to the audience that beauty is defined by simplicity rather than perfection. Beauty is relative and should not be constrained by societal standards, nor should it lead to the exclusion of some parties simply because they are different. The way Jillian Mercado wears her make-up appears as her medium to negotiate the beauty standards that have long been normalized by society. It is supported by the nude lip color choice which contrasts with most of the models nowadays in order to get attention from the public.

Additionally, her glamorous dress makes her more stylish as she wears a different outfit compared to the other models in the background. Jillian Mercado shows her self-confidence as she confidently rolls through the runway and reflects on her self-acceptance as a disabled model. Moreover, the pose of Jillian Mercado with her wheelchair breaks the societal rules that models should possess some beauty standards such as having a specific height, fair skin, slim body, and the like. Instead, she opts to highlight an ability from an individual with disability to empower other disabled people that they are skilful and capable.

Another exceptional thing to consider is the red high heel of Jillian Mercado. Ideally, high heels in the fashion industry functions as a medium to enhance a model's confidence in walking at a fashion show and support the overall appearance. However, as Jillian Mercado rolls the runway with her wheelchair while wearing high heels, it conveys a message that high heels are not only designed for the non-disabled model but are accessible for individuals of all abilities, including the disabled model.

In addition, the background color of those two photos is remarkable. In Semiotics, colors are not only served as encoded markers but also a verbal sign that motivates people to pay attention to (Danesi 2004) The connotation behind the red color may vary depending on the context it is used and it may be related with prevailing cultural and societal norms. In Western culture, red is mostly linked to energy and love while in the fashion industry it is often associated with power, confidence, and assertiveness (Puti, Syarifah, & Prasetyoningsih 2023)

1.4 Myths

There is a common belief that being beautiful means having an ability to fulfill people's expectations to look attractive, delicate, and feminine (Holmes 2017) According to Barthes (1972), Myth serves as a cultural phenomenon, reveals the ideological nature that exists behind any cultural products (Barthes 1972). In this context, Jillian Mercado assumes that she does not meet the societal beauty standard as she mentioned the term disability on the captions and told everyone about how she previously struggled to get to this point as a model because of her physical disability. However, she showed confidence in herself that even though born as a person with muscular dystrophy, it did not define her as a person to pursue her dream.

Since Jillian Mercado advocates body positivity at the event, she promotes acts of resistance against the beauty myth by representing herself as an individual with disability and a disabled model. Jillian Mercado's performance rolling in her wheelchair highlights self-acceptance by boldly asserting more inclusive beauty norms that have long been normalized by society. As Jillian Mercado rolled onto the runway at The Blonds NYFW 2020, she radiated inclusivity for those who have felt marginalized and often dominated by non-disabled individuals in the fashion

industry. Through her performance, she tried to motivate disabled community to accept their uniqueness and showed their capabilities.

In addition, her visibility at the event not only debunks ableism but also shows her identity as a Latina model with a disability. Since the fashion industry lacks diversity, the presence of Jillian Mercado became a benchmark for the fashion world to provide more space for individuals with disabilities as a form of support to empower them in the modeling world. Moreover, since Jillian Mercado was featured in the event and posted on her Instagram account, it highlights developments in media representation that send a powerful message of inclusivity. Jillian Mercado's journey indicates the urgency of visibility and representation in confronting stereotypes and advocating social change. Her work not only empowers other disabled people but also influences the fashion industry to create a more diverse and inclusive environment.

Jillian Mercado and Her Body



Figure 2. Jillian Mercado with Her Body

(Source: Jillian Mercado Instagram account @jillianmercado (Mercado 2023))

In Instagram post above (Figure 2), Jillian Mercado is depicted in two different photos on her Instagram account. In the first slide, she is portrayed nude, seated in a white chair. She is looking away from the camera, as if smiling wide to someone on the left hand-side of the camera. In the second slide, she is still in the same pose, looking in the same direction as the previous slide, but in her black electric wheelchair and her expression is more subdued and quieter. The similarities between these two photos are Jillian Mercado's hair is tied back in a ponytail, draping over her right shoulder. She is seated with her legs crossed while her hand, showcasing her little tattoo, covering her chest. Additionally, the photograph captures her from the left side angle, against a light cream-colored backdrop and slightly visible chunk of dead tree in the background on her left.

2.1 Linguistic Messages

According to the captions "Being comfortable in my own skin did not happen overnight. Quite the opposite, it was a long battle and a roller coaster of emotions that took place for years to get to this place," Jillian Mercado conveys a deep self-acceptance and confidence. The metaphorical expression on the phrase "Being comfortable in my own skin" reflects on how she accepts her body and makes peace with herself. The word "skin" refers to the sense of connection of Jillian Mercado with her body and soul. The phrase "did not happen overnight" highlights the natural

process of a journey that rarely ends in a day. There would be some hurdles and challenges that navigate Jillian Mercado in order to get to this point. It also indicates a milestone that never happened all of a sudden, instead, it required a long process and effort.

The journey towards self-acceptance never seems easy until it is done. The phrase “a long battle and a roller coaster of emotions” denotes a message that the process towards self-assurance is sometimes faced by ups and downs along the way. The term “battle” reflects the way Jillian Mercado’s struggle to discover genuine self-love and “roller coaster” signifies her path that is characterized by unpredictable surprises and challenges.

I like to imagine that my body is like the most beautiful garden I’ve ever seen. A garden is only beautiful, because you take time to water her, give her as much sun as possible, love every single pedal and leaf, make sure its surroundings aren’t harming the garden, but most importantly believe, believe that one day, you will look at yourself, and be amazed at how beautiful and unique you are, and that in itself is the most beautiful image you’ll see (Mercado 2023).

As Jillian Mercado uses the phrase “I like to imagine that my body is like the most beautiful garden I’ve ever seen” signifies a message through the metaphor of a garden that emphasizes self-care and self-love. The phrase “A garden is only beautiful, because you take time to water her, give her as much sun as possible, love every single pedal and leaf, make sure its surroundings aren’t harming the garden” highlights the significance of nurturing herself and giving so much love to her body as if treating a garden in a proper attention such as watering plants, giving enough sunlight, and caring to their process. It is the same as how we treat ourselves to maintain our well-being as a human.

The phrase “but most importantly believe” highlights the importance of believing in process and having confidence in our beauty and uniqueness. It denotes the transformative power of self-value and recognizes that we are all worthy for love. The message motivates all the Instagram users to embrace their weakness and appreciate their own beauty because being beautiful does not always come from physical appearance, instead, inner beauty comes from self-love and self-acceptance.

2.2 Non-Coded Iconic Messages

Figure 2 depicts two photos of Jillian Mercado seated, one in a naked pose on a chair and another in a wheelchair, with her legs crossed and radiating confidence. There are slight differences between those two images. The first slide shows Jillian Mercado in a cheerful expression indicating that as an individual with disability she tries to embrace her weakness and perceive it as a weapon to motivate other disabled people out there. In addition, as the photo shows Jillian Mercado with her legs slightly apart and a smile on her face, indicates that she shows a sense of welcome for everyone to talk with. Additionally, the portrait of her seated in a chair conveys a message of empowerment and interprets equality with non-disabled women.

In the second image, Jillian Mercado appears more solemn compared to the first slide with her legs crossed and slightly closer together. She is seated in a wheelchair with her hands resting on its base. While the first photo symbolizes happiness, the second photo seems different because it conveys a meaning that as a disabled woman, she often feels pressure, marginalization, and inequality that non-disabled women may not experience.

Jillian Mercado expresses freedom both on the first and second slides. It is seen from her gesture, pose, and healthy skin that represent herself. In terms of make-up, she is good at her flawless tone and matches with the hairstyle. The neutral background color also highlights Jillian Mercado as the single object and the angle focuses on the focal point without being distracted by other elements. In addition, Jillian Mercado looks very confident with her skin that she treated well.

2.3 Coded Iconic Messages

Figure 2 portrays Jillian Mercado in a series of body photoshoots for *Women's Health Magazine* along with other models ranging from Amanda Seales, Adelaide Kane, Hannah Stocking, Betina Gozo Shimonek, Sydney Leroux, Sarah Nicole Landry to Jessamyn Stanley. Speaking of *Women's Health*, it was produced by Hearst, a lifestyle magazine focusing on women's health, sexuality, nutrition, and fitness. It is released 10 times annually in the United States and boasts a readership of 1.5 million. With 13 international editions, the magazine is distributed in over 25 countries, reaching a global audience of over 8 million readers.

In a short reel shared on @womenshealthmag Instagram account entitled "How Do You Feel After the Body Issue Shoot," all the models featured on the naked photoshoot series expressed their feeling and emotion through a brief interview. Their responses were incredibly powerful as Jillian Mercado stated, "Amazing. Super comfortable. Everyone made a safe environment which is lovely. Let's just celebrate our body." Every model in this photoshoot felt a profound sense of freedom and liberation as they want to empower women all over the world to embrace their imperfections and to love their body because every woman should have equal opportunities to live a life they want to without fear of judgment.

Furthermore, those two images in Figure 2 indicate that beauty is subjective and depends on the lens from which we see individuals with disabilities. In the photos, two different viewpoints emerge. First, people may see a disabled woman as marginalized but Jillian Mercado debunks this stereotype by confidently showing her skin and posture, conveying empowerment as a person with a disability. Second, her sitting pose in both the chair and wheelchair represent all disabled community and advocate for visibility and inclusion, akin to non-disabled individuals.

2.4 Myths

Speaking of skin, Jillian Mercado portrayed herself shows herself with pride in her skin color that becomes her identity as "Jillian Mercado." She is also seated in the wheelchair which emphasizes her identity as a disabled model, debunking a notion that models must have an ideal skin and not be individuals with disabilities. Moreover, Jillian Mercado negotiates the beauty standard that suggests a woman with a fair skin, tall body, and straight hair. Instead, beauty is about showing our identity, expressing self-acceptance, and being proud of ourselves. She also conveys that every woman in the world should be freed from any beauty stereotypes and societal norms which often result in pressure and pain for women.

Furthermore, the portrayal of Jillian Mercado in the photoshoot negotiates the beauty myth by intersecting with multiple social identities. As a model and individual with disability, Jillian Mercado not only challenges prevailing societal beauty standards but also ableism and racism within the modeling industry that has been culturally normalized in our surroundings. In a longitudinal research done by Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi (2017) that studies the correlation between media depiction of racial minorities and Latino and Black Americans discovered that negative media representation continuously decreased positive imagery of Latino and Black people toward their ethnic group. Research also examines that media exposure related to

individuals' tendencies to compare themselves with people featured in media, as a consequence, elevate the social comparison process and lead to diminished perceptions of body image (Eyal, K., Te'eni-Harari 2013).

However, Jillian Mercado proudly embraces her both identities as a disabled Hispanic model and an activist to disrupt the narrow meaning of beauty standards that solely centered on able-bodiedness and Eurocentric features that glorify characteristics such as fair skin, straight or wavy hair, pointed noses, and slim bodies that dominated by media industry and lead to the narrow perceptions of beauty norms. Historically, these standards eventually become beauty ideals in this modern era due to the influence of western culture. In connection with Eurocentric beauty standards, Jillian Mercado advocates for a more inclusive and offers various beauty representations.

The representation of Jillian Mercado shows the importance of recognizing and celebrating all kinds of identities, confronting the beauty myth as homogeneous and exclusionary. Through her Instagram account, Jillian Mercado inspires other people to embrace their identities because every individual is unique and has their own representation as a human. The presence of Jillian Mercado played an important role especially in the fashion industry that mostly features women in flawless perfection. She portrayed her identity as both an individual with a disability and as a disabled model in this modern and transformative era. Through her Instagram account, she negotiates certain beauty standards criteria towards prevailing dominant ideologies that women must conform to particular beauty standards.

CONCLUSION

Jillian Mercado's existence in the fashion industry acts as a compelling proof to the prevailing definitions of beauty and the redefining of conventional boundaries. Her presence as both an individual with a disability and disabled model debunks the firmly established Eurocentric beauty standards that have long rooted the industry. Through her portraits such as in *The Blonds NYFW2020*, where she rolled through the runway with a gold stylish costume and headpiece, Jillian Mercado not only reconstructed the meaning of beauty but also promoted broader inclusivity and diversity.

The development of beauty standards in the world has often excluded those who do not fit with traditional beauty criteria. In this study, beauty standards appear as a social construction that Jillian Mercado consistently challenges and negotiates. According to the two analyzed Instagram posts on @jillianmercado, it can be seen that she truly reflects beauty negotiation and challenges the beauty standards that have long been dominated in society. Jillian Mercado, as a disabled model, negotiates societal beauty standards through self-acceptance, empowerment, and liberation. It is reflected through her Instagram captions conveying her diverse perspective towards beauty standards that every woman is beautiful and no one does not deserve to define a woman with societal beauty construction. Additionally, since people may perceive that being a model is hard for every individual with disability, she conveys a powerful message to everyone that being different is unique because each of us is destined for something good.

Jillian Mercado negotiates the societal beauty standards that often marginalize those who do not comply with traditional beauty myths by advocating for self-acceptance and embracing her identity as a disabled model. In addition, her career in the fashion industry promotes a more inclusive environment and influences other people to accept and celebrate their uniqueness. Roland Barthes' semiotic theory reveals how the representation of Jillian Mercado in the fashion

industry has changed societal beauty standards perspective by advocating inclusivity and accepting various definitions of beauty.

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