



Women's Resistance Against Beauty Standards Through the Dance Work *Gugatan Tubuh Perempuan*

Ariesta Putri Rubyatomo

Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung, Indonesia

ariestata19@gmail.com

Wiara Sanchia Grafita Ryana Devi

Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung, Indonesia

sanchiawiara@gmail.com

Dinda Nurul Aini

Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung, Indonesia

dindanurulaini68@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores *Gugatan Tubuh Perempuan* (*Indictment of Women's Bodies*), a contemporary dance work interrogating beauty bullying and social pressures on women's bodies. Grounded in the author's personal experiences through an autoethnographic approach, this research employs Practice-Based Research while drawing upon objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts) and the beauty myth (Wolf). Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation of the creative process, and then analyzed thematically. The choreography involves audience participation by attaching duct tape onto the dancer's body in a performance space set up as a photo studio, visualizing beauty standards as a form of restriction. Findings indicate that the subjectivity of personal experiences can be transformed into collective awareness, positioning dance as both a medium of resistance and healing. This study affirms the transformative power of dance not only as an artistic practice but also as a pedagogical one, offering a model of gender-equitable dance education for women's empowerment.

Keywords: Autoethnography, Beauty Standards, Women's Body, Beauty Bullying, Women's Empowerment

Corresponding Author:

Ariesta Putri Rubyatomo

ariestata19@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Women's bodies have long been an arena of cultural, social, and political regulation. Beauty standards constructed by colonialism, patriarchy, and media not only reduce women's identities but also perpetuate beauty bullying – mockery or discrimination based on appearance. In the Indonesian context, colonialism promoted the ideal of fair skin, later reinforced by patriarchal structures (Prabasmoro, 2003). A Dove survey (2016) revealed that 85% of women experienced pressure due to unrealistic representations of beauty (Septiyani & Indriastuti, 2017). This resonates with Wolf's (2002) critique of the beauty myth that deprives women of agency.

Dance holds potential as a medium of resistance and healing, transcending aesthetic or entertainment purposes. *Gugatan Tubuh Perempuan* was born from the author's autoethnographic reflection on experiences of beauty bullying, particularly ridicule related to dark skin tone and under-eye circles. Through this work, the author responds to social pressures on women's bodies by presenting an artistic resistance and renegotiating bodily meaning in public and collective spaces.

This paper develops from the author's master's thesis (Rubyatomo, 2023), aiming to create choreography that affirms bodily diversity, transforms personal narratives into collective awareness, and enriches gender-equitable dance pedagogy. The central questions are: How can dance articulate resistance to beauty standards, and how can artistic elements visualize experiences of beauty bullying?

METHODS

This research employs Practice-Based Research (Candy, 2006) combined with autoethnography, with *Gugatan Tubuh Perempuan* as its primary artifact. Practice-Based Research focuses on the

artistic creation process as a source of knowledge, integrating theoretical and empirical insights while enabling the development of practice-oriented dance education models.

Data Collection. Three main techniques were used:

1. **Observation:** Movement explorations were conducted in the studio with four female dancers over three months, considering diversity in skin tones and body shapes.
2. **Interviews:** Ten women aged 20–27 from diverse backgrounds (students, creative workers, project managers, performers) were interviewed. The guiding question was: “*What physical features make a woman considered beautiful?*” The interviews explored perceptions of beauty – both hegemonic physical standards and alternative narratives such as health, uniqueness, and self-acceptance.
3. **Documentation:** Reflective journals, choreographic notes, video recordings, and photos were used for reflection and analysis of the creative process.

Data Analysis. Thematic analysis identified patterns of resistance, objectification, and healing. Autoethnography complemented Practice-Based Research by reflecting the author's personal experiences of beauty bullying within broader social discourses.

Ethical Considerations. All participants gave informed consent, and audience anonymity was maintained during their involvement with duct tape interactions

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Work Structure

Gugatan Tubuh Perempuan is a 20-minute choreography performed by four female dancers in a performance space resembling a photo



studio. The work comprises four segments:

1. Being a Model

This segment depicts women positioned as “role models” expected to appear flawless, be the center of attention, and conform to beauty industry standards. Poses, catwalks, and interactions with a wardrobe prop symbolize the media- and pop-culture-produced construction of beauty.



Figure 1. Dancers in the Being a Model segment, performing catwalk poses, visualize the demands of uniform beauty standards. (Source: Uzi, 2023).

2. Oppression

Visualization of competition and bullying among women sustained by hegemonic beauty standards. The victimized dancer is forced to conform, suppressed with costumes and restrictive movements. This segment highlights how beauty standards function as a tool of domination, producing fear, obedience, and alienation.



Figure 2. Dancers in the Oppression segment display falling and rising movements as a

symbol of social pressure. (Source: Uzi, 2023)

3. Judging Women's Bodies

Women's bodies are positioned as objects of social evaluation. Through audience interaction with duct tape, the work demonstrates how society labels, silences, and enforces categories of beauty. Inner conflict arises between acceptance and rebellion, ending with dancers throwing down clothes as an act of resistance.



Figure 3. Audience members apply duct tape to dancers during the Female Body Assessment segment. (Source: Uzi, 2023).

4. The Choosing Body

The climax of liberation from beauty standards. By removing costumes and duct tape, dancers mark freedom from objectification. Choosing their own attire symbolizes bodily autonomy and identity beyond dominant constructions. The contrast between free and uniform dancers represents empowered bodies resisting beauty homogenization.



Figure 4. Dancers in the segment "The Body that Chooses" symbolize bodily autonomy. (Source: Adith, 2023).

Segment	Description	Artistic Elements
Segment 1: Being a Model	Women's bodies are presented as role models, objects of spectacle that must appear perfect according to media beauty standards.	Catwalk, charming poses, red dress costume, black boots, wardrobe prop, fashion-show style music.
	Visualization of competition and bullying among women; the victim is forced to submit to hegemonic beauty standards.	Push-pull movements, falling and rising, intimidating expressions, red costume, corset, high heels, tense music.
Segment 2: Oppression	Women's bodies are positioned as objects of social judgment; the audience labels them with duct tape, followed by resistance.	Duct tape prop, tight clothing, direct audience interaction, tense music, and actions of throwing/slamming clothes.
Segment 3: Judging Women's Bodies	The climax of bodily liberation, removing costumes and duct tape, symbolizes autonomy and resistance to homogenization.	Actions of removing costumes & duct tape, lighting effects (flashes, dimming), tension-relieving music, contrast between free vs. uniform clothing.
Segment 4: The Choosing Body		

The four segments form a layered dramaturgy, illustrating women's bodily journey from passive objects to active subjects. *Gugatan Tubuh Perempuan* thus functions not only as a representation of personal experience but also as a philosophical reflection on power relations, objectification, and resistance.

Resistance and Empowerment

- 1. Personal Level:** Provides space to reclaim bodily control, express emotions, and restore self-esteem. The free movements in segment 4 signify bodily recovery and autonomy.
- 2. Collective Level:** Connects personal experiences to collective struggles. Audience participation in duct tape labeling during segment 3 exposes social pressure and opens critical dialogue.

The work reflects objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and Wolf's (2002) critique, demonstrating how dance connects personal trauma with collective awareness.

Implications for Dance Education

The creative process can be adapted into body positivity workshops, involving bodily exploration through labeling activities and reflective discussions. This model supports the development of gender-conscious dance curricula (Risner, 2010).

Dance as Social Change

As Rowe (2010) argues, dance helps build collective identity, provides stigma-free expression, and challenges social stereotypes. *Gugatan Tubuh Perempuan* demonstrates dance as a medium of social transformation, bridging personal and collective realms.

Limitations and Recommendations

The study's limitations lie in reliance on personal journals, limited interviews, and



informal audience observations. Future research may expand participant numbers, employ surveys or focus groups, and examine long-term impacts of gender-themed dance works in education and communities.

CONCLUSION

Gugatan Tubuh Perempuan underscores the transformative role of dance in resisting oppressive beauty standards. Through integrating Practice-Based Research and autoethnography, personal experiences were transformed into collective awareness. The body emerges as a site of both resistance and healing. Beyond artistry, this study contributes to dance pedagogy by developing body positivity workshop models, fostering gender awareness, and highlighting dance as a tool for community empowerment.

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