

## Negotiating Sexuality: Indonesian Female Audience towards Pornographic Media Content

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### Abstract

As one topic deemed controversial in Indonesia, pornography is mainly discussed for its effect on teenagers as it is explicitly segmented for adult audiences. Nevertheless, it remains problematized when it comes to female audiences as sexual desires only belong to men according to the normativity of Indonesian society. This condition stereotypes female as not a “good woman” if they happened to watch porn. Engaging with the theory of pornography as sexual empowerment for women and applying new ethnographic method, this paper examines how Indonesian female audiences perceive pornographic media content and how it impacts their sexuality as a woman who lives in Indonesian patriarchal society. The study finds that women, on one side, are highly aware that they, too, have sexual desires just the same as their male counterparts. On the other side, they are also highly concerned about how people around them judge women who like sex or watch porn in particular; hence, it affects their sexual expression in their daily life. Furthermore, watching porn has made them negotiate their sexuality as women to try to make sense of their sexual fantasy and reality.

**Keywords:** Sexuality; pornographic media; female youth audience; new ethnography; media psychology

### Introduction

In general, people tend to attach negative associations to the word ‘pornography.’ That association is not without a cause. Pornography has been considered to bring more harm than benefits (Haryatmoko, 2007; Junaidi, 2012; Reist & Bray, 2011; Voss, 2019). Discussions about pornography often focus on moral issues; pornography is considered contrary to the moral value of goodness and nobility. Pornography is seen as banal, immoral, haram, and so on (Barker, 2006; Lindsay, 2010; Tarrant, 2016; Weitzer, 2010). This view is one of the results of

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the social construction of Indonesian society, which considers sexuality taboo, and in so many aspects, pornography is closely related to human sexuality.

When sexuality is considered taboo, the process of talking about sexuality, especially in the public sphere, is considered an activity that is embarrassing or contrary to moral values that are considered as good in society. It has implications for the elementary level of sex and sexuality education in Indonesia (Bennett et al., 2018; Smith-Hefner, 2019). Thus, programs that contain topics of sex and nudity have become taboo, considered embarrassing to talk about in public, and even disgraceful. Pornography, which is defined as a spectacle containing images related to sex and nudity, is seen as something negative and destructive in society. This view is also supported by the results of studies that primarily focus on the negative effects of pornography on its viewers (Supriati & Fikawati, 2009; Suyatno, 2011; Yutifa et al., 2015). All of these researches have questioned the negative effects of pornography on underage viewers (children and teenagers), especially teenage boys. However, as adult entertainment, pornography should not be watched by children and teenagers. Pornography as a medium of adult entertainment should be present for the audience segmentation 18 years and over and is not limited to only men but also women.

Amidst rampant public blasphemy against pornography, it still lives in the media content industry. Just like other forms of media content industries, the pornography industry faces more or less the same challenges, ranging from piracy, employment issues, regulations, pandemic situations that make everything uncertain, and many more. The industry would not exist without a market, and the media industry, specifically, would not exist without an audience. The audience's position in the media industry is a significant milestone in running an economic business that supports the life of the media itself (Albornoz & Barnett, 2015; Mosco, 2009). So, if pornography is something that is considered as bad, why does the pornographic content industry itself still survive? By using the logic of the relationship between the entertainment media industry and the market, it can be assumed that pornographic content has its niche market. At this level, pornographic content has an audience that, to some extent, has supported the lifecycle of pornographic content as an entertainment media industry.

The general negative view of pornographic content raises questions regarding how the audience of pornographic content interprets pornography itself as a concept or as an activity of watching porn. Moreover, the position of the female audience becomes more complex with the normativity of the patriarchal society in Indonesia, which has a set of beliefs that sexual desire only belongs to men (Bennett et al., 2018; Johansson, 2007). This paper examines the experience of watching pornography by female viewers in Indonesia who are legal age to watch adult content. This niche is significant, considering that women have the same opportunities as men regarding accessing pornographic content.

## Literature Review

Pornography refers to visual depictions that aim to arouse the audience's sexual desires (Hartley, 2019; Tarrant, 2016). At this level, things categorized as pornography include photographs, magazines, adult television channels, and films. In this digital era, the most popular forms of pornography are available in online photos and videos. In the future, with various technological developments that exist, it is possible that the forms of pornography

could experience innovations and shifts regarding how it is disseminated and enjoyed by the audience.

However, this definition results from the most objective approach to viewing pornography. In general, especially in Indonesian society, pornography is still interpreted detestably. It is defined as an explicit representation (can be in the form of pictures, writings, paintings, photographs, and others) of sexual activity or things that are indecent, lewd, or obscene, which are intended to be widely communicated to the people (Haryatmoko, 2007; Ogien, 2003). This definition is, of course, problematic and raises many polemics, mainly related to subjectivity, perceptions of representation, and conceptions of morality which are based on general views that exist in society (Haryatmoko, 2007).

The question then is, what about works of art that feature nudity? If it is judged to be obscene or perverted, is the artwork automatically categorized as pornography? This banality of pornography seems to present a dichotomy in the fields of art and visual culture, namely with the emergence of the term *erotica* (or often referred to as *eroticism*). When pornography is intended to stimulate sexual arousal, then *erotica* is a product of art that is considered to have a more noble purpose, namely symbolization, storytelling, and others. When pornography is considered to reflect patriarchal hegemony where there is repression and oppression of one party (generally women), *erotica* is considered to describe sex equally, so there is no subjugation in it. While pornography is seen as symbolizing domination, *erotica* symbolizes mutualism (Tarrant, 2016).

At this level, the dichotomy between pornography and *erotica* understands that *erotica* is good pornography. In contrast, pornography is seen as something that is essentially bad, because it is considered to have no artistic value (Tarrant, 2016). However, the term *erotica* is not widely known in the general understanding of society. In the context of a country that makes the discussion of sexuality taboo like Indonesia, the boundaries between pornography and *erotica* are blurred. People barely know the terms *erotica* or *eroticism*. When the slightest part of the body is exposed in a specific form of media, or when there is a sex scene that appears in it, people will immediately label it as porn.

In addition, the discourse in body is identified with pornography often being associated with a woman's body rather than a man's body. For example, the case happened to a dangdut singer named Inul Daratista, who was charged with Indonesian's Constitution of Anti-Pornography because of her dance moves (which is famously known as *goyang ngebor* in Bahasa Indonesia). This case is an example of how women's bodies and the taboo of sexuality among Indonesian people impact the joints of life, especially the entertainment media (Heryanto, 2008; Yulianto, 2007).

In this case, Inul's dance moves were not seen as a form of art, but rather a porn (Junaidi, 2012). The notion that Inul's dance moves is seen as porn indicates various inequalities in Indonesia. Firstly, the position of dangdut music in the map of the Indonesian music industry tends to be seen as the music of lower society class, so that it is identified with something cheap. Secondly, Inul, as a female public figure, is placed as an object that is displayed to invite the lusts of the male audiences. At this level, Inul is considered as having no agency in making decisions about her appearances on stage. Thirdly, related to regulations, the Anti-Pornography Law -which was passed in 2008 - has become problematic with the obscurity of pornographic elements, even since in the Indonesian Criminal Codes (KUHP). The ambiguity in the substance aspect was then exacerbated by confusion in implementing the law.

Inul's case is only one of the many cases that illustrate how the normativity of patriarchal society has resulted in unequal gender constructions against women and men, especially related to sexuality. This inequality raises a double standard in society, where when men talk about sexuality or related to sexuality in public spaces, positive masculine-related things will be attached to them. At the same time, women will get negative stigmas such as whore/slut or immoral women when they become associated with sexuality in the public space (Johansson, 2007; Parker & Aggleton, 2007).

The emerging studies related to the issue of pornography are currently in two contested paradigms with polemics and debates that are far from over (Meehan & Riordan, 2002; Tarrant, 2016; Weitzer, 2010). The first paradigm views pornography as 'oppression'. The oppression seen in pornography occurs on two levels. The first is the oppression of women. This paradigm is firmly held by the feminist circles, especially those who emerged in the second wave of the feminist movement. Pornography is considered a symbol of the oppression of women, where women are subjected to such objectification and are only shown to fulfill men's desires. This view sees the position of female workers in the pornographic content industry as victims who do not have agency or power in choosing their jobs. However, this is problematic because, on the other hand, there is a stigma that women who work in this industry are dirty and disgusting women. Unfortunately, the echo of the second wave of feminist resistance to pornography does not solve the problem of the stigma attached to women who explore their sexuality.

The second level in the paradigm that views pornography as oppression is the oppression of the pornographic content audience. This paradigm sees pornography as a tool of moral degradation, dehumanization, and harmful to its viewers' mentality and mental health. This paradigm is perpetuated by various studies that state the negative effects of pornography on its viewers, where they show problems related to intimacy, integrity, commitment in relationships, and others. Unfortunately, this is a backlash for the efforts of gender equality brought by the feminist movement. The general view of the negative impact of pornography, either directly or indirectly, has made women stigmatize other women; that the women who like sex (and appear in pornographic videos) are bitches and naughty seducers of other people's partners. Most women have an ingrained belief that when their male partner watches porn, he is having an affair (Reist & Bray, 2011).

The oppositional paradigm views pornography as empowering (Meehan & Riordan, 2002; Tarrant, 2016; Weitzer, 2010). Contrary to the first paradigm, this perspective is echoed by postmodern wave feminists who state that prostitution and pornography are empowerment for women when these actions are choices they take consciously and not under pressure from certain parties (Voss, 2019). At this level, this paradigm emphasizes the context in which pornography is produced. When the female workers involved in it consciously and voluntarily choose to be there, it cannot be seen as oppression. On the other hand, oppression only occurs when female workers are involved because of coercion or pressure from other parties.

At the audience level, this paradigm tries to raise the other side of the effect of pornography on the audience. When pornography is watched by the proper segmentation (adults over 18-year-old), not all viewers experience the negative effects that are always echoed and believed by adherents of the first paradigm (Johansson, 2007). Several studies note that watching pornography for women can increase self-confidence and sexual arousal. In addition, some couples use pornography to harmonize their relationship. In addition, watching pornography is used as a healing method for victims of sexual violence to overcome their

trauma during sexual intercourse; this is because the pornographic genre watched is not a genre that contains violence (BDSM) and more like the soft-core genre instead.

This paradigm notes that pornography, at some point to some extent, can be empowering and liberating, and entertaining and enjoyable. It tries to deconstruct the view that the first paradigm has confirmed by seeing that not all porn viewers are unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy. Although this paradigm is still a minority during the general view that has been formed through the first paradigm, this paradigm offers a more humanist perspective in viewing individual experiences so that the researcher considers that this paradigm is in line with the objectives of this paper. Therefore, without aiming to judge women who watch pornography and explore sexuality through these activities, this paper attempts to look at the point of view and production of meaning by female viewers on pornographic content concerning sexuality.

## Methods

This research is designed with a critical paradigm within the framework of the phenomenological tradition, where the communication process is seen through the individual's self-experience as an independent subject. Thus, the meaning of pornographic content and the activity of watching pornographic content is seen as the arena or background for the contestation that will be dismantled in this research. In other words, individual self-experience is used to dismantle the negotiations carried out by pornographic viewers in the face of the socio-cultural context that surrounds them. For this reason, this work employed new ethnography by Paula Saukko ([2003] 2018).

Different from classical ethnographic method which emphasizes on the emic view of the community under researched (Yulianto, 2015), Saukko stated that this new ethnography allows researchers to examine the dialogic shifting between the researcher and the subjects' perspectives involved in the research (Saukko, 2003). It should be noted that the defining feature of new ethnography is its commitment to be 'truer' to lived realities of other people. As such, new ethnography usually challenges concepts – such as 'resistance' – that social research uses to categorize or label individuals. It argues that these labels do not reflect the lived realities of the people being studied but often render them supporting evidence for the scholar's theoretical or political frameworks or projects.

In this study, the new ethnography is used to examine the views and behavior of female porn viewers. Moreover, viewing pornographic content is considered a part of their real-life (being more accurate to the lived realities) without leaving out the factor that daily practice is not value-free from social discourses in society (Saukko, 2018). Thus, the new ethnographic method provides an opportunity to study this phenomenon. Therefore, researchers and participants are involved mutually to find similarities and see differences (Saukko, 2018). The views of the researcher and the subject are expressed through a dialogue that does not erase each other's perspectives but brings them together. However, one of the characteristics of this ethnographic method is that it is undeniable that the researcher's perspective is decisive. However, the diversity of opinions and the many points of view (polyvocality) will be a manifestation of being more faithful to lived realities.

The informants in this research consisted of eight Indonesian women from 18 to 28-year-old who were selected through the purposive sampling technique. Specifically, the sexual

orientation of the eight women in this research is heterosexual. In-depth interviews with informants carried out data collection techniques in this study. The data analysis technique in this study was carried out by extracting data on polyvocality into the categorization of the framework of thought which later became the result of this research.

In the spirit of new ethnography, this research does not seek to find truths or errors but rather to search for similarities and differences and why they occur by describing the existing context. To get closer to informants' experience, this paper's Results and Discussion part would address the main findings and analysis in a storytelling format. Lastly, to protect the personal data of informants, all the names mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms.

## Results and Discussion

Pornographic content, whether legal or illegal, whether considered as excellent or banal, is an integral aspect of understanding the sexuality of the individual who is the audience for that content. In Indonesia, pornographic content is illegal and considered bad and banal by the normative community. Viewers' prevalence of such content being circulated and enjoyed indicates a bigger picture than just efforts to fulfill basic human needs, namely libido or sexual desire. In watching pornography carried out by the women in this study, there is an effort to negotiate their understanding of sexuality.

The informants in this study admitted that they did not receive adequate sex and sexuality education, either through formal education in school or personal discussions in family forums with their parents. Moreover, they argue that the lack of sex and sexuality education results from the taboo on discussing sexuality itself in the public sphere of Indonesian society. In fact, according to informants, sex and sexuality education is essential for the younger generation to understand issues of gender, identity, and reproductive health, instead of encouraging promiscuity and premarital sex, which have been discourses as reasons for tabooing sex and eliminating the education of sex and sexuality.

Discussions about sexuality are significant in discussions of gender. Sexuality, in general discussion among ordinary people, is often understood as sexual orientation, which often experiences a dichotomy of being heterosexual and homosexual. However, sexuality as a concept refers to something more complex than just sexual orientation. On the other hand, sexual orientation is just a part or aspect of sexuality.

Sexuality includes biological, social, psychological, and cultural dimensions in human life, related to how humans experience and express themselves as sexual beings, as well as human self-awareness of sexual needs (Giddens, 2013; Parker & Aggleton, 2007). In short, sexuality can be understood as aspects of human life related to biological, social, political, and cultural factors related to sexual activity that affect the lives of individuals in society. The question then is, how is sexuality correlated with gender?

Similar to the concept of sexuality, the word gender is often misunderstood in general public discussions in Indonesia, which still often equates gender with sexual characteristics (or genitals). It is related to the gender dichotomy into two types adjusted according to sexual characteristics: the masculine gender for humans with male genitals and the feminine gender for humans with female genitals (Baron & Kotthoff, 2001; Ida, 2001). In fact, gender as a concept is a term that was born as an effort to resist the sex dichotomy classification, which divides humans into two types according to their sexual characteristics. However, especially in



Indonesian society, the term gender has been reduced to as if it were the same as sexual characteristics or genitals.

Gender is the division of human social roles based on their gender. Therefore, instead of sexual characteristic, a biological aspect of the human body, gender is a social construction attached to the biological aspect itself. Thus, in practice, gender is intertwined with psychological, social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of life—human life and society. Therefore, the correlation between gender and sexuality is undeniable. When social construction in society performs gender classification based on human's sexual characteristics, issues related to sexuality also tend to be classified, which more or less regulates and determines how men/masculine and women/feminine respond to their sexuality (Baron & Kotthoff, 2001; Parker & Aggleton, 2007).

In the meaning production process of female pornography viewers towards pornography and pornography viewing activities, it is implied how gender construction in Indonesian society has been internalized and shaped the way they think and perceive. Women have complex tendencies in interpreting pornography and viewing pornography activities. This tendency can be seen in the negotiation efforts on sexuality carried out by the informants in this study, which will be described in the following highlights.

### ***The satisfied-but-guilty ones: "Sexual desire is humane, but why do I feel disgusted for having it?"***

In the structure of a patriarchal society, men are believed to be superior beings compared to women. It raises the conditions in which women are placed in the object-subject relation towards men (men as subjects and women as objects); one of them is the conception of sexuality (Baron & Kotthoff, 2001; Nilan, 2009; Smith-Hefner, 2019). Patriarchal society has built the concept that in sexual relations, men are subjects and women are objects, likewise, in the discourse related to pornographic content. The criticism of the sex and pornography industries is that they are created and perpetuate the dominance of masculinity over femininity. The pornographic content produced so far is considered to have been intended only for a male audience and perpetuates the practice of objectification towards women (Voss, 2019; Weitzer, 2010).

This patriarchal discourse regarding the porn industry has become an internal understanding that people often do not question; pornography is intended for a male audience. Therefore, if there are men who are viewers of pornography, it is a commonplace, natural, and considered normal by society (Gardiner, 2002; Nilan, 2009). This understanding was found in the women in this research. For the informants, social norms are troubling when juxtaposed with their habit of watching pornographic content.

"[trans.] Yes, not according to the norm. Because in eastern culture, norms are highly respected. Even pornography is considered so taboo that people are often embarrassed to talk about it. I sometimes feel guilty for watching those porn videos and don't want other people/strangers to find out because it will burden my morale, and I might be labeled as a bad person." (Eva, Informant, 2021)

The statement above shows that the normative patriarchal society in Indonesia has constructed that watching pornography is natural for men but not for women (Bennett et al., 2018; Gardiner, 2002; Nilan, 2009).

In this research, one informant thinks differently, namely that watching pornography does not conflict with social norms, and she admits that she is not morally burdened by it. However, this view must be acknowledged as the minority view even among women themselves. Most Indonesians, both men, and women, still think that sexuality is only natural when men talk about it.

Female viewers tend to be self-conflicted when viewing pornographic content for the first time. The average age of the informants in this research when they first watched pornographic content was at the elementary school to junior high school age.

“[trans.] At the time, I honestly felt disinclined and guilty, because I saw people naked and having sex, but at that time I didn't know what they were doing. In my mind, this is just why anyone would dare to do this.” (Jasmine, Informant, 2021)

“[trans.] At first I felt strange and disgusted to see two people having sex. I was also embarrassed to see it because I had never seen the activity before. When I first watched it, I wasn't used to it and was shocked. Why was there such a pornographic scene?” (Eva, Informant, 2021)

‘Disinclined, guilty, weird, disgusted, and shocked were the expressions used by the women in this research to describe their discomfort feelings when they first watched pornographic content. This condition shows an indication that pornography, in particular, or sexuality in general, is only intended for men (Johansson, 2007). This understanding seems internalized in women, so they question themselves when accessing pornographic content for the first time. ‘Is this the right thing for me to do?’

Furthermore, the patriarchal understanding that has been internalized in women creates self-conflict when they begin to explore their sexuality through watching pornographic content. On the one hand, informants tend to feel guilty and question their morals when watching pornographic content. On the other hand, they cannot deny some kind of satisfaction they get through these activities.

“[trans.] According to my experience, watching porn can provide benefits when I'm stressed, miss my boyfriend, or when I'm feeling aroused. After watching pornography, I feel good and it helps me relax.” (Jasmine, Informant, 2021)

At this level, women negotiate their sexuality through the dialectic of guilt and satisfaction that they get at the same time through watching pornographic content. This effort can be seen as a form of resistance to the patriarchal understanding that it is normal that sexual desire and satisfaction belong only to men and is not reserved for women. Besides, awareness that watching porn is making them feel good and relaxed could be seen as how female porn audiences are 'empowered' by pornography. As time passes, when they first watch pornographic content, the discomfort feelings are slowly fading and being replaced with comforts. Realizing and acknowledging that they are also human beings who have the right to have and feel sexual desire is the first step for women to self-empowered and renounce the unjust patriarchal belief.



*The attached ones: “Is it for the sake of me, or the sake of my significant other?”*

For the informants, the watching pornographic content is not just an activity to get entertainment but an expression of sexuality. This is reflected in their decision to watch pornographic content when they long for the presence of their male counterpart (partner/boyfriend). Informants in this research had a relatively high sexual awareness expressed through their activity of watching pornographic content during their PMS (pre-menstruation syndrome) period, where their libido reached its highest level. Thus, there is a tendency that the relationship between informants and the pornographic content they access has a personality that is not reduced to mere entertainment facilities (Cover, 2019; Yarhouse & Sadusky, 2020).

“[trans.] Not very often, about once a month. I watch pornography as PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome) approaches because the hormones estrogen and testosterone produced increase when ovulation occurs. This then increases my libido during PMS.” (Silvia, Informant, 2021)

“[trans.] I often watch pornographic content, especially when I'm very tired. Pornography can be a source of entertainment for me and a source of relaxation. In one week, I can watch up to 3-5 times with a duration of about 10 minutes per one viewing.” (Aurora, Informant, 2021)

For informants in the research (all of whom were heterosexual), the activity of watching pornographic content tends to be attached to the romantic relationships they have with their male partners, in the following ways: (1) watching pornographic content with their partners, (2) watching pornographic content when missing a partner, and (3) watching pornographic content recommended by a partner.

“[trans.] After my first experience watching pornography when I was in elementary school, I didn't watch it right away, I was disgusted. When I entered puberty and experienced what is called menstruation, I began to feel like the opposite sex, but well, I haven't reached the ‘lust’ stage yet. I often heard several times that my friends in middle and high school opened porn sites, but I wasn't interested. Finally, when I was in college, I met my boyfriend, and for some reason, now I'm starting to have an interest and lust for the opposite sex. My boyfriend then asked me to watch porn. At first, I was a bit amused, but over time I became interested. We've been dating for two years, and yes, you could say it was him who introduced me to watching porn. Finally, now I like watching pornography, even though I'm not with my boyfriend.” (Jasmine, Informant, 2021)

The question then is: can heterosexual women not enjoy pornography without their male partners? On the one hand, the attachment of women to men who become their partners in enjoying things that smell of sexuality again leads to indications that there is a social normativity created through gender construction, that sexuality can only be (or may) be enjoyed by men. On the other hand, whether they have a partner or not, a woman's decision (regardless of her motivation) to fulfill her sexual desire by watching pornographic content can be a manifestation of a sexual revolution that is resistant to gender construction itself.

In other words, there is a spectrum of women's agency that plays a role in making decisions to watch pornographic content. On the one hand, their motivation tends to stick with

their male counterparts. On the other hand, in the end, they enjoy the process and no longer feel self-conflicted. At some point, to some extent, women have managed to reverse their position from objects (which attach sexual motivation to men) to subjects (who enjoy sexuality for themselves) (Johansson, 2007; Reist & Bray, 2011; Tarrant, 2016).

At this level, women negotiate their sexuality through reasonable efforts that they have the right to explore sexual desires for the sake of the romantic relationships they have with partners of the opposite sex. On the one hand, this could be a form of hegemony or even oppression of women, especially when viewed from radical feminism. However, on the other hand, it cannot be ignored that, in the end, women can seize their agency by finding satisfaction for themselves, thus being free from hegemony, although not completely. Therefore, this spectrum of women's agency shows how pornography empowers female audiences, particularly informants in this research, who can find satisfaction and not be oppressed in watching porn.

### *The hiding ones: "I won't tell anyone else, unless..."*

The conception of a patriarchal society in Indonesia has placed women in an obnoxious position regarding sexuality (Bennett et al., 2018; Ida, 2001; Smith-Hefner, 2019). If a man talks about his sexuality in public, he will look dashing. On the other hand, if a woman talks about sexuality in public, she will look naughty or even slutty. This condition encourages informants to hide or restrain themselves not to discuss sexuality in public spaces. At some point, to a certain extent, they have the awareness and concern that talking about sexuality in public will give them a banal and lousy impression.

In the discussion on self-disclosure of porn viewing activities, the informants tended to say that this process is significant in their journey to understand sexuality. The informants only dared to open up to their closest friends (peer group) about their habits of watching pornographic content.

"[trans.] Closest friend. The reason I tell some of my friends is that I need to share information and experiences of sexuality while watching pornographic content as a form of self-understanding and spiritual experience in seeking physical pleasure. Their response is to enjoy and exchange information because I choose only trusted friends." (Silvia, Informant, 2021)

In addition, the closest friend is a person they have selected based on common preferences. In this process, whether consciously or not, there is an effort to avoid social judgments that may arise if they disclose information to others that they are watching pornographic content.

Women choose their audience, or the people with whom they share information about pornographic activities in particular and sexuality in general. This concern is not without reason. Several informants who claimed to have grown up in a religiously conservative family were brought up with the moral value that women should not discuss sex and sexuality with other people. However, in finding and constructing identity (including sexuality), young people feel an urgency to share with their peers. Many of them utilize peer groups as the 'anchors' of self-identity.

Young people's motivations for self-disclosure and sharing with their peer groups vary, starting from searching for self-affirmation and self-acceptance to finding a place where they

feel accepted as themselves (sense of belonging). In terms of sexuality, however, the process of self-disclosure becomes more complex, especially for young women. By carrying out the process of self-disclosure related to sexuality, they are vulnerable to social justice because of the normativity of patriarchal society, which taboos women's understanding and daring to talk about sexuality in public spaces.

At this level, women negotiate their sexuality through audience selection efforts for information and the self-disclosure related to watching pornographic content. On the one hand, Indonesian society has begun to open up about gender equality, which has enabled young women to find partners in discussions about sex and sexuality. On the other hand, the patriarchal construction that is still entrenched in society forces them to hide and carefully choose whom they talk to if they want to talk about sex and sexuality.

### *The contested ones: "Porn isn't real. And that's it, ... I guess."*

At some point, to a certain degree, pornographic content causes a kind of concern, even fear, for women.

"[trans.] The disadvantage is wasting time. I also think about pornography all the time, so sometimes I can't focus, have negative thoughts towards men, even during studies, and fear being treated like women in porn videos, and become addicted to pornography (always want to watch more)." (Eva, Informant, 2021)

This trend shows that pornographic content produced and circulated in the community is still aimed at male audiences and is produced with the principle of the male gaze (Johansson, 2007). Thus, there is an imbalance in how female viewers interpret the pornographic content they access at a certain level. This condition affects female viewers who believe that what they see in pornographic content can happen to them at the subconscious level.

On the other hand, women have the power to explore their sexuality through viewing pornographic content. Even though they watched pornographic content for the first time when they were minors, the informants in this research admitted that pornographic content never lowered their productivity level at all. On the contrary, pornographic content is one of the entertainment facilities chosen to release the fatigue and mental pressure they feel from their daily activities.

As they have entered adulthood, the informants in this research showed that even though they have the power to determine regulations for themselves, they still watch pornographic content with caution. On the one hand, the informants in this research admitted that they did not receive adequate sex and sexuality education, either from formal educational institutions (schools) or from family communication forums (parents). On the other hand, although they get much information related to sex and sexuality through pornographic content, they are aware that it is different from sex and sexuality education. At this level, informants are aware of the role of pornographic content as a means of entertainment and not as a means of education.

Sex and sexuality education, admitted by the informants, comes through searching for information on their own (via the internet) and discussing it with their closest friends. According to the informants, significant sex and sexuality education covers the functions and

workings of the genitals, safe sexual relations, contraceptives, and the risks of sexual intercourse. To a certain degree, watching pornographic content helps informants get to know their sexuality better. However, this pornographic content must be equipped with a thorough understanding of sex and sexuality, most of which they do not get through pornographic content.

At their current age, informants can apply self-regulation as follows: (1) determine what genre of pornographic content they like to watch; (2) measure the portion of time (when and how long) they spend watching pornographic content so as not to get caught up in addiction and non-productivity; and (3) distinguish between the sexual fantasies they see in pornographic content and reality.

The informants' discovery of their preferred genre was not a short journey. They go through various moments to find various genres of pornographic content, to get the genre that is their preference. Often, they find a genre that makes them surprised, even traumatized in the process. The process that the informants have passed in finding preferences for the genre of pornographic content is one of the records of their search for sexuality. Their preference for pornographic content genres tends to shape their sexual preferences.

Through their preference for pornographic content genres, informants tend to build sexual relationship styles. The majority of informants in this research stated that they prefer the amateur genre, which for them gives the impression of being real and feeling close to everyday life. At this level, there are indications of the audience's resistance to the construction of sexuality displayed in pornographic content. The informants did not like pornographic content packaged with excessive or seemed intentional. On the other hand, simplicity and amateur style were key to informants' preferences.

In addition, most of the informants admitted that they preferred the soft-core genre to the hardcore. At this level, the assumption that viewers of pornographic content always like violent and violent sex scenes is not proven. On the contrary, this research reveals that viewers of pornographic content prefer soft and romantic sex scenes.

As part of sexuality, sexual fantasy is a significant aspect. Regarding sexual fantasies, the informants in this research admitted that they fulfil their sexual fantasies through pornography. To some extent, these sexual fantasies affect their ideal image of sexual relations and sexual expression that a person can have with a partner, or even their ideal image of the physical appearance of themselves and their partner (Johansson, 2007; Reist & Bray, 2011). However, the informants in this research are aware that they cannot force these ideals to manifest into the reality of their lives. At this level, as viewers of pornographic content, informants can provide a boundary between fantasy and reality.

The complexity of women in a patriarchal society is illustrated through the stories and experiences of women informants. In addition to the banality inherent in the image of women who dare to discuss sex and sexuality in public spaces, a female informant also admitted that watching pornographic content has created bodily to a certain point (Reist & Bray, 2011). Pornographic content almost always features women with ideal body proportions. An informant acknowledged it as having caused concern. It even motivated him to diet and exercise to form an ideal body like the one in pornographic content.

However, several other informants did not have this insecurity. They admit that they have explored enough pornography genres to know that pornographic content does not always feature women with bodies that are considered proportional. At some point, to a certain degree, these two female informants realized that pornographic content offered ideals and

fantasies, something that is far from reality for them (Tarrant, 2016; Voss, 2019). Based on this, they do not care about their appearance or body and compare it to what they see in pornographic content.

The background of the romantic relationships owned by female informants (heterosexual) in this research was that they had partners of the opposite sex who were currently their lovers or husbands. To a certain extent, this condition tends to be a motivator for female informants to explore their sexuality. They do not feel worried about their bodies because there is open communication and in the process of communication. In the communication process, they understand with their partners that the female body displayed in pornographic content is mere fantasy and not real. At this level, female informants get a kind of affirmation and acknowledgment that regardless of how a woman's body is seen or depicted in pornographic content, their partner will still accept their natural body.

On the one hand, this condition is a form of liberation for women to feel more confident about their bodies and not be bound by the ideals constructed by the media; in this case, pornographic content. On the other hand, the affirmations they get from their partners may show the position of women, who are still objects in the structure of a patriarchal society. If they do not get the affirmation from their partner, will they still accept their own body without feeling any insecurity at all?

At this level, women negotiate their sexuality through efforts to realize that what they watch in pornographic content is fantasy rather than reality. However, the effort to put what they watch in pornography into fantasy seems to have produced specific fragments related to fear and self-acceptance. The problems are rooted in the patriarchal construction that has placed heterosexual women as mere objects of sex and sexuality.

## Conclusion

Women who regularly watch porn are negotiating their sexuality through (1) an effort to rationalize that sexual desire is a normal thing for them despite the society telling them otherwise, (2) selecting whom to discuss about sexuality with in order to avoid social judgments, (3) understanding that porn is not real, but admitting at the same time that they did learn one thing or two from it. The negotiation process cannot be separated from the patriarchal society in Indonesia as the socio-cultural background that, at some point to some extent, has constructed the way Indonesian women think and act about their sexuality. In the bigger picture, however, this negotiation process indicates that pornography is, at some point to some extent, empowering the female audiences through awareness and self-consciousness they gain during the activity and meaning production of watching porn.

The construction of a patriarchal society gives rise to many problems related to women's sexuality, whether viewers of pornographic content realize it or not. The activity of watching pornography itself, for women, on the one hand, has provided a space for exploration of sexuality. However, on the other hand, it reflects gender inequality in a patriarchal society when it enters the stage of producing cultural meaning by its audience. In the bigger and more holistic picture, the main problem does not lie in the pornography itself, but rather in the way patriarchal society has set the subject-object power relation between male and female. Making porn illegal does not solve sexuality problems in society, but gender equality does.

In conclusion, the lack of sex education in Indonesia has been highlighted as another core problem in youth exploring sexuality. The misconception that sex education somehow could lead and evoke the free-sex culture among youth is often being used to why the Indonesian government is reluctant to include sex education as part of the formal education curriculum. However, this research has revealed that the misconception has obscured the fundamental importance of sex education. The main point is to give youngsters comprehensive knowledge regarding reproductive health, self-acceptance, and gender-just relationships.

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