

## **Female Sexuality in Indonesian Girls' Magazines: Modern Appearance, Traditional Attitude**

### **Introduction**

This paper looks at the representation of females in Indonesian female teen magazines as being at a crossroad. Girls' magazines seem to represent modernity at the surface. However some elements of the contents seem to claim modernity as a source of vice, by claiming adherence to "Indonesian culture".

Brenner argues that women often bear the burden as indicators of modernity. She observes:

that images of women more than men have been used to signify the transition from tradition to modernity, and that this has its own significance in the Indonesian context.<sup>1</sup>

However Williamson indicates that women are often used as indicators of a society's adherence to tradition. She says that:

Women, the guardians of "personal life", become a dumping ground for all the values society want off its back but must be preserved to cherish: a function rather like a zoo, or nature reserve, whereby a culture can proudly proclaim its inclusion of precisely what it has excluded.<sup>2</sup>

These two opinions, although seeming to stand directly opposite to each other, are mirroring what the society expects from women, which is often contradictory. The society wants both modern and traditional women. Sometimes a sex goddess and a saint are expected out of a single woman.

This expectation is represented in Indonesian girls' magazines, since young girls in these media are the future women. I aim to show that girls' magazines as social products subtly reflect the society's expectation by oscillating back and forth between a pop star image and a good little girl. These two sided representation of adolescents

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Brenner, "On the Public Intimacy of the New Order: Images of Women in the Popular Indonesian Print Media" *Indonesia* 67 (April 1999), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Williamson (1989: 106).



are juxtaposed in the magazines. However the contradictory nature is either lost or blended in such a way as to enable both images to stand side by side.

Modernity and tradition in the magazines are upheld by using the west as a yardstick to go for or against certain values. In short, western pop idols are good role models for modern appearance but not good models when it comes to respecting traditional values. The message from the magazines is: if Indonesian adolescents are cool, they are as cool as their western popular idols; but, if Indonesian adolescents are bad, they are not as bad as their western counterparts.

My magazine samples are collected between 2002 and 2003. In a survey done by A. C Nielsen, magazines came third as the most popular media that attracts advertisements in Indonesia after television and newspapers.<sup>3</sup> The magazines I chose for my research are *Gadis*, *Kawanku* and *Aneka Yess!* because, according to a survey conducted by A.C Nielsen, these are teen magazines with the highest readership.<sup>4</sup> When compared with other female teen magazines, these magazines are also the longest running female teen magazines in Indonesia.

### **The Modern and the Conservative**

Girls' magazines present images of good-looking adolescents on almost every page. Apart from news from the entertainment industry, fashion is the staple of female teen magazines. Fashion is one way to enter the modern world and modern fashion is western fashion. In teen magazines, fashion serves to form an identity that differentiates popular adolescents from those who are not. Through this they simultaneously establish their collective membership of the global fashion industry. Advertisers complement these images with products to achieve the look of, or to enable the imitation of, the look of the models. Female magazines are passionate about detailed close-up photographs.

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<sup>3</sup> According to A.C Nielsen Survey in *Indonesia. World Magazine Trends 2001/2002* <http://www.magazineworld.org/assets/downloads/IndonesiaWMT01.pdf> (date accessed 2 August 2004).

<sup>4</sup> A.C Nielsen Survey in *Indonesia. World Magazine Trends 2001/2002*



An important thing to note is that the ideal physical beauty bears great resemblance with western physical appearances. The constant representation of models with white skin in the magazines is an obvious indicator. Advertisements for whitening lotion are also ubiquitous in females' magazines in Indonesia. A smooth and acne-free complexion is not enough, beautiful skin has to have a light colour as well. Since the launching of Pond's Skin Whitening cream in the 1990s, almost all cosmetic brands in Indonesia have produced their own lines of skin whitening products. And is not just in Indonesia. For example, the *Taipei Times* reports:

While Westerners spend cash topping up their tans to appear attractive, many Asians are slathering on lotions to reduce skin colouring as they embrace a different concept of beauty that for them says white is right. Studies by market research company Synovate say sales of skin whitening products in Asia are soaring as the region's beauty conscious try to lose the pigmentation they consider unattractive. Nearly half of Hong Kong women surveyed by the company last year bought such treatments, up from 38 percent in 2002. Whitening creams were also bought by more than a one-third of females in Indonesia, Malaysia and Taiwan. ...In Thailand, the whitening lotion segment accounts for more than 60 percent of the country's annual US\$100 million facial skincare market.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from advertisements for whitening lotion, the absence of girls with dark skin also indicates the widespread preference for lighter skin.

Showing light skin means revealing more and more of the flesh. In spite of the fact that Islam is the religion of the majority in Indonesia, female teen fashion ideals in magazines does not deter them from flaunting the flesh. Hipsters and sleeveless tank tops are the norms. Following field studies in Indonesia in 1999, Pam Nilan comments that:

It is curious that although Indonesia is a strongly Muslim country there are rarely any images of veiled young women in Muslim dress in the magazines, despite the increasing popularity of this trend among middle-class young

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<sup>5</sup> "White is still right? On the surface anyway" *Taipei Times*. Thursday, 25 March 2004. <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/feat/archives/2004/03/25/2003107738> (date accessed 8 April 2004). See also Patricia Goon and Allison Craven, "Whose Debt?: Globalization and Whitefacing in Asia" *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*. Issue 9, August 2003 <http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue9/gooncraven.html> (date accessed 6 May 2004), Julie Matthews, "Deconstructing the Visual: The Diasporic Hybridity of Asian and Eurasian Female Images" *Intersections*. Issue 8, October 2002. <http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue9/gooncraven.html> (date accessed 13 May 2004) and Hannah Beech, "Eurasian Invasion" *Time Asia*. April 23, 2001 vol. 157 No. 16 <http://www.time.com/time/asia/news/magazine/0,9754,106427,00.html> (date accessed 7 May 2004).



Muslim women...The clothing depicted in girls' magazines is often revealing and the poses are provocative. However, standards of female modesty are required of most young women in Indonesia, whether veiled or not.<sup>6</sup>

Several years after that, around the time of my research, more and more women are wearing veils and more and more Islamic women magazines are published. However the girls' magazines I collected for my samples still feature girls in tight, see-through, or flesh-revealing outfits.

The magazines negotiate this un-Islamic fashion in two ways. First, female adolescents are posed in such a way as so to stress their childishness. Therefore their innocence and cheerfulness negate any sense of sensuality despite the skimpy gear. Second, there are more and more images of ordinary teenagers wearing *jilbab*<sup>7</sup> in the teen magazines' articles. These ordinary teenagers wearing *jilbab* serve to balance the magazines' content of western fashion. In a way, these *jilbab*-wearing teenagers are maintaining (to a certain extent they are *emphasizing*) modernity because they are not portrayed conducting religious activities: they are shown attending a concert or entering a modeling contest.<sup>8</sup> They appear in pictures sent to the editors or enquiring about a chance to pose for a fashion page.

As mentioned previously, modesty, with or without *jilbab*, is achieved by constructing poses that demonstrate childishness, cheerfulness and innocence. One of the constant adolescent images is the wide toothy smiles that signify happiness and a carefree outlook. The colourful covers support the notion of childish fun. The magazines sustain a cute, innocent, cheerful and happy image. Facial expression, pose, colours and decorative illustration produce the intended effect of female naivety. Covers of female teen magazines show cute expressions compared with the more sensual covers of the male teen magazine *Hai*. Kinsella in her discussion of cuteness in Japan reveals

<sup>6</sup> Pam Nilan, "Romance Magazines, television soap operas and young Indonesian Women" *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*. Volume 37, no. 1. Canberra: The Association for the Publication of Indonesian and Malaysian Studies, Inc., 2003, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Islamic attire that involves covering the hair.

<sup>8</sup> See for example in *Aneka Yess!* no. 21. 9-22 October 2003 p. 122, a girl wearing jilbab is seen involved MC course held by the magazine. In no. 23, 7-20 November 2002, p. 60, a girl with jilbab in a beauty course session. In p. 128, girls wearing jilbab in a tour groups to Singapore. In p. 154, girls parading head scarves for *Ramadhan* (the fasting month) but they are all wearing tight top with short sleeves. In p. 156 a girl wearing jilbab poses with her boyfriend who is also her teacher. They pose with their faces close to each other.



that childishness in fashion and attitude is a manifestation of Japanese teenagers' "refusal to grow up" because the adult world is seen as bleak and oppressive.<sup>9</sup> However, cuteness in Indonesian teen magazines may be used to negate the sexiness of the flesh-revealing outfits worn by the models. Girls' magazines thrive on these images of cheerfulness and childishness.

This is apparent in the contrast between the covers of *Aneka Yess!*, *Kawanku* and *Gadis* and the covers of the Indonesian boys' magazine *Hai*. Covers are important as a signpost to suggest what potential readers may expect in the content. Unsurprisingly, then, the covers of female teen magazines often bring readers' attention to the models' appearance, stressing the faces of pretty girls with flawless complexions. In contrast, the covers of *Hai* magazines have more variety. They show different formats in terms of photograph lay-out and they usually include a background to the bodies, not just faces. Most covers of girls' magazines reflect the way these magazines are preoccupied with the meticulous detail of facial beauty. The make-up has to be done perfectly in order to look flawless for the close-up shoot. The covers of *Hai* on the other hand indicate that physical beauty is not as important.

Another icon for modernity is the appearance of Eurasian models in the magazines. They represent the mix and match of local and global attributes. One of the manifestations of this global-local mix-match is the popularity of Eurasians in the Indonesian entertainment business. Teen celebrities with mixed European and Indonesian blood (called *Indo* in Indonesian language) have long been popular in the Indonesian media. In this respect, then, female teen magazines are just continuing a long adulation of Eurasians. These Eurasian teens have the advantage of not just fulfilling the standard required look, they are also the embodiment and the materialization of two cultures: the east and west.

The media, and the public's fascination with Eurasian celebrities echoes admiration for the western persona without betraying their own origins. Yanto Zainal, the

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<sup>9</sup> Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, eds (Hawai'i; United Kingdom: University of Hawai'i Press, Curzon Press, 1995), pp. 242, 250.



president of an advertisement agency from Jakarta who claims that “*Indos* have an international look but can still be accepted as Indonesian [sic]”.<sup>10</sup> The idea of *Indos* being Indonesian, despite all the western attributes they reproduce, turns out to be important for these magazines as well. In fact, there seems to be a certain pride in being able to claim as Indonesian anything that has a western touch. So, instead of identifying these Eurasian teen celebrities as “westernised” and coming from “out there”, the magazines proudly introduce them as Indonesians. The media is so saturated with Eurasians that, “If you only looked at the media you would think we [Indonesians] all looked *indo* except for the drivers, maids and comedians”.<sup>11</sup> Once again, the idea that class and status are attached to the west is apparent here.

In these magazines, teen celebrities with Eurasian blood cannot go unnoticed. Eurasian parentage is always mentioned in teen media as if to boost the image of teen celebrities.<sup>12</sup> Mixed parentage mostly suggests ideal beauty and appearance and serves to justify their popularity (not to mention their ability to speak English or another European language fluently). The adulation of Eurasians to some extent shows that beauty is not always in the eyes of the beholder but can sometimes be a constructed convention. Telling the public that someone has a Eurasian ancestry seem to add value to the visual effect.

By extension, being white should be combined with modifying other parts of the body. The following is a quote from an advertisement for contact lenses. It is in a pull-out booklet form attached to one issue of *Gadis*:

“You don’t have to be a westerner to have colourful eyes. Just wear contact lenses. Your eyes will become more expressive.”<sup>13</sup>

This “expressiveness” is clearer in an advertisement where each eye colour is given a character: “Bubbly Blue”, “Mystic Grey”, “Soothing Honey” and “Gorgeous Green”.

<sup>10</sup> Hannah Beech, “Eurasian Invasion” *TimeAsia*, April 23, 2001, vol. 157 no. 16

<http://www.time.com/time/asia/news/magazine/0,9754,106427,00.html> (date accessed 7 May 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Dede Oetomo as quoted from Hannah Beech, “Eurasian Invasion” *TimeAsia*, April 23, 2001, vol. 157 no. 16 <http://www.time.com/time/asia/news/magazine/0,9754,106427,00.html> (date accessed 7 May 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Emma Baulch, “Alternative Music and Mediation in Late New Order Indonesia” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* Vol 3, 2002, pp. 219-234.

<sup>13</sup> *Nggak harus jadi orang barat untuk bisa punya mata berwarna. Pakai saja lensa kontak. Mata pun jadi lebih ekspresif.* *Gadis* no. 25/XXX/16-25 September 2003.



Bubbly blue is cheerful and pleasant. Mystic grey is intelligent and interesting. Soothing honey is realistic and matter-of-fact. Gorgeous green is passionate and beautiful. All characterizations are in English to stress the expressiveness of these western eyes. In big letters stretched across the page the theme is printed in Indonesian: “There is a Rainbow in Your Eyes” (*Ada Pelangi di Matamu*). This rainbow theme mirrors not only the variety of colours but also the option and the ability to change, as even westerners with “colourful” eyes only have one natural colour. These soft lenses therefore enable Indonesian female adolescents not only to be more “expressive”, but also to change the colour of their eyes whenever they please. The dissatisfaction of having expressionless eyes is compensated for by acting as the agent of change.

There seems to be a subtle satisfaction in getting closer and closer to the white western image, not just with skin resemblance but also with eye colour. The above advertisement implies that western eyes are more desirable since “colourful” eyes are more expressive. The category of colourful excludes the colour of Indonesian eyes. It constructs native Indonesian eyes as less exciting because they are not as cheerful, pleasant, intelligent, interesting, realistic, matter-of-fact, passionate or beautiful. More quotes from contact lens advertisements in *Kawanku* and *Aneka Yess!* support this notion:

[A]ren't you jealous of Kirsten Dunst's clear blue eyes or Britney Spears' brown hazel ones? Throw away your jealousy. We can have brown, blue, or even green eyes. Change your eye colour in seconds. The secret? Soft lenses, of course!<sup>14</sup>

Are you often fascinated by Elijah Wood's eyes that are as blue as the sky? It's alright to be fascinated, but you have to know that we can be like them! Just wear contact lenses and match it with the right make up, and you won't be beaten by their looks.<sup>15</sup>

This desire for western eyes is made more explicit in the above advertisements, with references to western celebrities. Jealousy is a silent admission of admiration, as admiration projects a sense of a standard that puts the object of jealousy above the

<sup>14</sup> ...ngiri nggak sih ngelihat mata biru bening seperti Kistren Dunst atau coklat hazel [English word original] seperti Britney Spears? Sekarang buang deh rasa iri. Kita juga bisa kok punya mata berwarna coklat, itu, atau hijau sekalipun. Dan warna mata kitapun bisa diubah dalam hitungan detik. *Rahasia? Pakai soft lens dong!* *Kawanku* no. 32/ XXXII, 3-9 February 2003. p. 71.

<sup>15</sup> *Kamu sering terkagum-kagum melihat bola mata Elijah Wood yang sebiru langit? Kagum sih boleh saja, tapi kamu harus tahu kita juga bisa seperti mereka! Tinggal pake contact lens dan sesuaikan dengan riasan mata, kamu nggak akan kalah oke deh!* *Aneka Yess!* no. 23. 7-2 November 2002. p. 78.

admirer. Envyng western eyes implies that those eyes are superior. In order to be equally attractive and superior, Indonesian eyes have to make the proper adjustments. However the discourse of western superiority is disguised in a discourse of empowerment to renounce inferiority:

“...we can be like them!”

“...you won't be beaten...”

The more these advertisements emphasize the ability to imitate, the more they are putting western images on a pedestal.

Bordo, in her analysis of contact lens advertisements, argues that even though contact lenses may not imply any political or racial message, the preference for certain colours is problematic.<sup>16</sup> The dominant race is never represented as imitating the less dominant one. An advertisement for contact lenses in *Cosmopolitan* magazines prefers darker eyes, but does not allude to dark eyes as belonging to any (eastern) race.<sup>17</sup> Deep dark eyes are seen as expressive without making any reference to the imitation of any specific racial group.

In the magazines, it is interesting to note that colour choice of the soft lenses is more open to those with light skin:

For those with dark skin, pick colours with a brownish hue...

For those with whitish skin, pick colours that are paler, like blue or grey.<sup>18</sup>

This gives the impression that those with white skin have more options with regards to fashion. This suggest that those with white skins have more opportunities to be noticed in the society and eventually leads them to have more options.

### **Shaping the Attitude through Gendered Sexuality**

The magazines separate the identity of female adolescents from that of mature women. Female adolescents in the magazines are not portrayed as young women but

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<sup>16</sup> Bordo, pp. 251-58.

<sup>17</sup> See *Australian Cosmopolitan Hair and Beauty*, Issue 1, 2, p. 29 and 3, 2004 and *Cosmopolitan*, issue 378, December 2004, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> *Untuk yang berkulit cenderung gelap, pilih warna-warna kecoklatan...Untuk yang berkulit cenderung putih, pilih warna-warna yang sedikit pucat seperti biru dan abu-abu. Gadis no. 25/XXX/16-25 September 2003.*





rather, as teen girls living in a sequestered world. There is no rush for them to grow up. Nilan argues that teen magazines teach young girls about relationships in preparation for adulthood. They are *mencari jodoh* or looking for a soul mate.<sup>19</sup> However, girls' magazines do not foreshadow the fact that their girl readers will become mothers and wives. Images of devoted and unselfish mothers and wives, full of responsibilities, would contradict images of carefree teen girls. Lessons on romantic boy/girlfriend relationships in girls' magazines are, therefore, not so much about "marriage messages" as about the entertaining aspect of a relationship and the status of having a boy/girlfriend. Teen articles deal with, and discuss ways to avoid, stress in pursuing a relationship as well as ways to maintain a "healthy" relationship.

Advice on boyfriend and girlfriend relationships is always based on the assumption that Indonesian teenagers do not engage in premarital sex.<sup>20</sup> The sexuality in the magazines is always assumed to be heterosexual. Sexuality in girls' magazines is discussed most of the time in terms of prevention of, and caution against, the lure of premarital sex. In girls' magazines, sex education is about providing moral guidance with regards to appropriate female sexuality. It is full of messages about morality. In contrast, sex education in *Hai* boys' magazine is about responding to the curious nature of boys who want to know more about their sexual organs and their function. In the boys' magazine *Hai*, there is a consultation column called "Q&A". At the bottom of the column is an explanation about what the consultation page is about:

This consultation column is not intended to show how stupid the person who asks the question is. On the contrary, having the guts to ask will prove useful, to you and to other readers. So basically, don't be afraid to share, man. Whatever the problem just ask Nurse Lolli!<sup>21</sup>

The sex education in *Hai* is done in a cheeky and humorous way. The name "Nurse Lolli" is seemingly intended to invite blunt and daring questions. The illustration of Nurse Lolli evokes the game of "playing doctor" as she is a busty blonde nurse

<sup>19</sup> Pam Nilan, "Mediating the Entrepreneurial Self: Romance Texts and Young Indonesian Women", in [medi@sia](mailto:medi@sia) T.J.M. Holden and T. Scrasce, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press [in press].

<sup>20</sup> In contrast with Iwu Dwisetani Utomo's finding in "Reproductive Health Education in Indonesia: School Versus Parents' Roles in Providing Sexuality Information" that there many adolescents engage in premarital sex, more that the society is willing to acknowledge. In *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 37.1 (2003), 107-134.

<sup>21</sup> *Kolom konsultasi ini sama sekali bukan buat nunjukin bahwa yang nanya cemen. Justru, berani bertanya bakal banyak gunanya; buat diri sendiri dan pembaca lain. Prinsipnya, jangan takut buat sharing Jack. Apapun masalahnya, kamu tanya aja ke Suster Lolli! "Q&A" Hai 29 September – 5 October 2003 / TH XXVII no. 39, p. 46.*



wearing a red mini skirt and a long white coat, dangling her stethoscope. The column indicates that sex consultation for boys is not a matter of protecting honour or dignity. It is treated as if sex education were a matter of satisfying curiosity – ostensibly about biology. Moral issues are not often involved.

One example of the questions is about distinguishing semen from other substances discharged from a penis:

That's not *air mani* but *air madzi*! *Air mani* is the same as semen, but *air madzi* is a different thing altogether. *Air madzi* is the discharge that comes out before the semen; it functions to cleanse the urethra from disease before the semen comes out. Usually *air madzi* is discharged when we're horny.

When you're with your girlfriend surely there must be something physical that you do other than chatting and looking at each other. At least holding hands. Well, because this activity is done with such tingly feelings (sometimes with some wicked fantasies), eventually you're sexually aroused and you get an erection. This is when the *air madzi* is discharged.<sup>22</sup>

Sex education, either implicit or explicit, in the magazines is a good indicator of the traditional gender ideology rooted in Indonesian society. The sex education in the girls' magazines is a reflection of the society's interpretation of gendered sexuality. Sexuality is highly cultural, and sex education in the magazines is not only a biological explanation, it is also about (and sometimes especially about) religious and social norms.

The sexual discourse in girls' magazines is therefore frequently dissociated from the body and always tied in some way to its social and spiritual (religious) meanings:

'If you think about it, it doesn't make any sense, does it, how can a baby pass through such a small opening like the vagina?' asked Chica in amazement.

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<sup>22</sup> *Itu bukan air mani, tapi air madzi! Air mani tuh sama dengan sperma, sedangkan air madzri beda lagi. Air madzi adalah cairan yang keluar sebelum sperma keluar, yang fungsinya untuk membersihkan uretra dari berbagai bibit penyakit, sebelum uretra dilalui sperma. Biasanya air madzi ini bakal keluar kalo kita lagi horny. Kalo kita lagi berduaan sama pacar pasti ada aja dong aktivitas fisik yang kita lakukan selain sekedar ngobrol-ngobrol dan bertatap mata doang. Yah, minimal pegang-pegang tanganlah...nah, berhubung nih aktifitas dilakukan dengan perasaan yang dalam (yang kadang-kadang juga diiringin dengan fantasi-fantasi yang nyeleneh), ujung-ujungnya bisa bikin libido terbangkit dan penis juga jadi ereksi. Kalo udah begini, jelas aja air madzi netes!*

"Cairan Setetes" [A Drop of Liquid] *Hai* 29 September – 5 October 2003 / TH XXVII no. 39, p. 46.



‘That is the Glory of God, Cha...’<sup>23</sup>

With its frequent emphasis on the social and moral aspects, sex education in female teen magazines evades the serious issues of sexual intercourse and pregnancy prevention, which are the two main issues of sex education in English-language magazines.<sup>24</sup> Sexual education in Indonesian girls’ magazines consist of basic anatomy and not physiology, as shown in *Gadis* which is an explanation about the vagina. It reads:

Vagina/orifisium vaginae This is the ‘gateway’ to the womb. This orifice is used for copulation (sexual intercourse) and also for giving birth.<sup>25</sup>

This article does not explain what happens to these parts and how they are used during sexual intercourse (“the vagina is used for sexual intercourse” – yes, but used in what way? how?). It assumes that readers already know from some other source. Adolescents must try to put the pieces together from what they see, read or hear. School curricula in Indonesia do not include sex education per se. Rather, information about the anatomy of reproduction is usually incorporated into biology lesson.<sup>26</sup> It is then presumably up to the teachers to improvise or not about how reproduction actually occurs.

This detachment of sex education from sexual practice and meaning is parallel with Brumberg’s findings about the discourse of menstruation among American teenagers, where discussion is more about the effect of menstruation (leaking, lethargy, nausea, PMS) than about the meaning of menstruation (that is, that a girl now has the ability to get pregnant).<sup>27</sup> In Indonesian teen magazines, menstruation is about selling sanitary pads, panty liners and painkillers. As in Brumberg’s findings, explanations about menstruation are about “eggs” and “ovulation” and all the scientific terms, but not about relating menstruation to sexual intercourse. The closest the articles in the magazines get is subtle warnings such as: “There is now a possibility of getting

<sup>23</sup> “*Kalau dipikir-pikir, rasanya agak nggak masuk akal, ya, bayi bisa lahir melalui saluran sempit seperti vagina...?*” ungkap Chica nggak percaya. “*Itu namanya kebesaran Tuhan, Cha...*” *Gadis* no. 25 /XXX/16-25 September 2003.

<sup>24</sup> I compare it with English language magazines such as *Cosmo Girl*, *Elle Girl*, *Girlfriend*, *Dolly*.

<sup>25</sup> *Gadis*, 25/XXX/15-25 September 2003.

<sup>26</sup> See Sriyono et al., *Sains Biologi untuk kelas VII* [Biology for year 7]. (Jakarta: PT Sunda Kelapa Pustaka, 2004), pp. 53-64.

<sup>27</sup> See Joan Jacobs Brumberg. *The Body Project. An Intimate History of American Girls*. (New York: Random House, 1997), pp. 39-55.



pregnant from an intimate relationship with the opposite sex. That is why a girl has to be careful after she gets her menarche.”<sup>28</sup> Again, there is no further explanation about the intimate relationship.

All advertisements for sanitary pads make claims about comfort, as if the wearer is not having a menstrual period. With pads, the demonstrations in advertisements only involve white fabric and blue liquid. Panties are replaced with white cloth, and dark red menstrual blood is replaced with some blue substance. Perhaps the idea is to get the image as far away as possible from the real image of menstrual blood, since this is not the fresh blood of life but more like objectionable waste blood. This breaks down the whole process of menstruation into something unnatural and hidden. In short, discussions of periods revolve around the idea of not showing any trace of the menstruation in the form of pain, premenstrual syndrome, leaking or bulging.

There are no advertisements for tampons in the magazines. The menstrual devices advertised are all in the form of pads. Presumably this avoidance is linked to the ideal of virginity. Tampons are just too close symbolically to the penis, suggesting the insertion of something foreign into the vagina before before marital penetration. It invokes either the idea of penetration or of masturbation, which are threats to ideals of virginity; neither of which is a topic any advertising company wants to address. The absence of tampons in these magazines suggests that female virginity is treated as “sacred”. The “mysterious” treatment of the vagina shows that knowing too much about its function will lessen its sacredness, which depends on the naivety and innocence of young girls.

In the discourse on sexuality in the magazines, the attention of female adolescents is directed towards social and moral issues. Female teens are expected to take up the role of moral goal-keepers. They have the responsibility of saying “no” and must take control, as male teens are deemed not to be fit to think as clearly as female adolescents:

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<sup>28</sup> “kemungkinan hamil bila melakukan hubungan intim dengan lawan jenis sudah ada. Itulah sebabnya, cewek harus bersikap lebih hati-hati setelah mendapat haid” *Aneka Yess!* no. 04, 13-26 February 2003, pp. 74-5.



As girls, we have to be smart to tell which one is true love and which one is infected with the lust 'virus'. Don't mix the two together.<sup>29</sup>

The quote reflects the assumption that it is common for male adolescents to be sexual but it is the girls' job to prevent the pregnancy catastrophe by being asexual. Sexuality and sexual intercourse, on the rare occasions these are discussed in the magazines, is rarely discussed as purely a biological process. It is always imbued with moral messages. The morality issues seem to block the reality of sexual intercourse itself, leaving the information incomplete. Rather than fulfilling the adolescents need to know what does and does not make a female pregnant, the magazines seem to assume that teen readers know from some other source already. Information frequently stops at the actions leading to intercourse, continuing instead with the morality discourse:

Once "lust" gets into our blood stream, there will be signals that our body is "turned on" or sexually aroused. What really shows, for instance, is the fast and heavy breathing, like a person who's been out jogging or walking briskly. Then our face will blush, our body temperature rise and we start sweating. This is the point where love turns into lust!!! ....At this critical time, we have to get hold of ourselves and strictly say 'stop' before it's too late. If we don't want to have an intimate relationship before the time comes, if we don't want to get pregnant when all of our friends are still hanging out, if we don't want to make our parents hysterical and ashamed because of what we've done, if we don't want it ... just say 'NO'!<sup>30</sup>

The discourse of sexual education is designed to be punitive by building up images about "hysterical parents". The parents referred to here are basically the girls' parents, of course. The punitive discourse continues by blaming premarital sex for being the source of crimes:

According to research, if someone has been sexually active (has had sexual intercourse) that person will be addicted. Once he really wants to do it, he

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<sup>29</sup> Sebagai cewek, kita mesti lebih smart [English word original] untuk memilih mana yang namanya cinta sejati dan mana yang sudah terkena 'virus' nafsu. Jangan mencampuradukkan keduanya. "Sexita" in *Gadis* no. 27/XXX/7-16 October 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Begitu darah kita dialiri oleh berbagai hormon 'nafsu' ini. akan muncul tanda-tanda kalau tubuh kita 'terangsang' alias mengalami dorongan seksual. Yang paling mononjol misalnya, nafas kita semakin cepat dan terengah-engah, mirip orang yang habis berlari atau berjalan cepat. Lalu bibir dan wajah kita memerah, suhu tubuh menghangat dan berkeringat. Inilah titik di mana cinta berubah jadi nafsu....Pada saat yang kritis ini. kita mesti segera sadar dan dengan tegas mengatakan 'stop' sebelum terlambat! Tentunya kalau kita nggak mau melakukan hubungan intim sebelum saatnya, kalau kita nggak mau hamil saat teman-teman kita masih asyik bergaul, kalau kita nggak mau bikin ortu kita histeris dan malu karena perbuatan kita, kalau kita memang nggak mau....Just say 'NO' [English words original]. "Sexita" *Gadis* no. 27/XXX/7-16 October 2003



would do anything to be able to do it, even without love! He would easily resort to free sex... or do something criminal like raping! Eeuuch...<sup>31</sup>

This last comment indicates that a sexually active unmarried person is introduced to female teens as a potential rapist, and in an Indonesian social context that person can only be male. The above discourse assigns female adolescents with the duty to say “no”, assuming that they have less or no sexual desire – unlike their boyfriends. Therefore, the female task is made even greater, since their boyfriends are now potential rapists. Not only do these girls have to be moral guardians, but also they have to redeem their nasty boyfriends and turn them into good guys.

Sex is a topic the teen magazines treat with great caution. Western teen magazine can easily publish an article entitled “Can you get birth control without your parents’ permission?”.<sup>32</sup> In Indonesia the main theme is always “How not to engage in premarital sex” as opposed to “how to have safe sex”, a topic that frequently features in western teen magazines. Licensed international magazines in Indonesia have to be selective in creating the “local” style of the magazine in order to acknowledge local values in their rhetoric. For example, *CosmoGirl Indonesia* published an article about sex education in its December 2002 issue. It was criticized by one of the readers:

I am criticizing your article about sex education. You said that beautiful sex is the one done at the right time with the right person, when you are mature. You should correct that, sex is beautiful if you’re married. The reason is that when we engage in a relationship, we all feel mature and think of our partner as the right person, which leads them to think that it is all right to do the things you’re not supposed to do and allowed to do.<sup>33</sup>

The editor’s response to the above letter was:

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<sup>31</sup> Menurut sebuah penelitian, jika seseorang sudah sexually active [English words original], maka ia akan ketagihan. Saat keinginannya memuncak, ia akan melakukan apapun untuk melakukannya, bahkan tanpa cinta ! Dengan mudah ia akan terjebak free sex [English words in original]...atau bahkan melakukan tindakan kriminal seperti memperkosa ! Hiii...  
Gadis no. 27/XXX/7-16 October 2003.

<sup>32</sup> [www.gurl.com/more/ads/to\\_your\\_health/index.html](http://www.gurl.com/more/ads/to_your_health/index.html) (date accessed 28 March 2003).

<sup>33</sup> aku mau kritik sex edunya CG!. Di situ CG! bilang bahwa sex yang indah adalah sex yang dilakukan pada saat yang tepat dan dengan orang yang tepat, yaitu saat dewasa. Harusnya diubah, seks itu indah bila dilakukan dalam ikatan pernikahan. Soalnya setiap orang pacaran pasti merasa sudah dewasa dan menganggap pasangannya sebagai orang yang tepat, jadi mereka akan merasa sah-sah saja untuk melakukan hal yang sebenarnya belum pantas dan boleh mereka lakukan. *CosmoGirl Indonesia*. January 2003. p 14.



If you read the part in the article about the risk of premarital sex, especially the part about pregnancy, you will realize that CG! is very much against premarital sex.<sup>34</sup>

The ability to get pregnant is one excuse parents use to restrict young girls' access to the public sphere. They would say that it is not safe to go out too much or too late and exercise a strict curfew. This makes the activity of going out socially a precious event, and girls have to prepare for it meticulously. The magazines pick up this cue by providing information about knick-knacks, tips-and-tricks, and all other details associated with going out. This explains the elaborate clothing, hair and make-up styles of teenage girls portrayed by the magazines. They are shown hanging around malls and shopping centres in order to pose and show off.

However, the girls' magazines represent the girls looking attractive but not sexual. Therefore, as I noted earlier, they place the responsibility for not provoking male desire in female hands, as suggested in an article entitled "Dress Sexy. Why Not?". In this article, female and male adolescents are asked for their opinions about wearing sexy out-fits. Here are some of the responses:

Febryna [female, student of SMUN 105 high school in Jakarta]  
It doesn't suit our culture. Guys' eyes will strip you off....

Yudra [male, student of SMUN 2 in Depok]  
That's western culture, man! Well, you'll look unique, but it's so overdoing it and inappropriate. Why would you want to flaunt your body. I don't think I would ever have a crush on a girl like that.

Putri [female, student of SMU Hangtuah]  
I don't like girls who wear sexy outfits, it's just showing your body too much, not to mention how that would make guys have nasty thoughts.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kalau kamu baca tulisan di artikel itu tentang resiko seks di luar nikah, terutama di bagian kehamilan, di situ kamu akan lihat bahwa CG! sangat menentang seks pranikah. *ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Febryna, SMUN 105, Jakarta.

"Nggak sesuai sama budaya deh. Bisa bikin mata cowok jelalatan...."

Yudra, SMUN 2 Depok

"Itu mah budaya barat! Memang terlihat beda sih, tapi terlalu berlebihan dan nggak pantas. Badan kok diobral. Kayaknya, gue nggak bakalan deh, naksir cewek yang pakai baju seperti itu."

Putri, SMU Hangtuah I

"Saya nggak suka tuh ngelihat cewek-cewek yang pakai baju seksi, kesannya menunjukkan aurat banget, apalagi cowok-cowok pasti pikirannya sudah macem-macem."

"Tampil Sexy. Kenapa Nggak?" [Dress sexy. Why Not] *Aneka Yess!* no. 21. 9-22 October 2003, p. 28.



The article acknowledges that only females are sexually desirable and only males have the power to look. Girls cannot look back at boys. Western culture is seen as the bad influence in abusing female sexuality by entertaining the male gaze. The comments seem to forget the fact that some of Indonesia's traditional costumes are see-through, tight and revealing. The point is that public discourse on sexuality and sexiness is often associated with western culture and frequently seen as a reason to give it a negative label. Although beauty ideals are guided by western influences, local discourse still plays an important role as a defence of, and justification for or normalizing control in the display of feminine beauty. In the above article, the practice of wearing skimpy and tight outfits by female adolescents is counteracted with the discourse that a too-revealing outfit is not "our" culture (as opposed to "their" western culture).

Public discourse demands modesty from females and regulates displays of beauty in the public space. Most discourse claims that this modesty is inherent in Indonesian culture. Any divergence from standard of modesty must be a bad foreign influence. An article about beauty contests (which originated in America in 1921)<sup>36</sup> made lots of encouraging comments and provided interesting facts and glamorous images of winners of beauty pageants. The article then slipped in comments about Indonesia's stand with regards to beauty contests:

Hmm ... you know, don't you, that Indonesia is one of the countries that consistently does not want to be involved in any international beauty pageants. The reason is that it is not in line with our country's cultural values.<sup>37</sup>

A lot of discourse in the media is against the swimsuit competition in beauty pageants, saying that it breaks the eastern rule of modesty in public displays of beauty. However, the article goes on to explain Indonesia's own version of the beauty contest:

Putri Indonesia [the name of the pageant, meaning "Indonesian princess"] requires the 3Bs, which is the combination of Brains, Beauty and Behaviour. This year's pageant has recorded that 3 percent of the finalists are postgraduate students.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Gadis*, no. 25/XXX/16 - 25 September 2003, p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> *Hmm..tahu sendiri dong, Indonesia adalah salah satu negara yang konsisten nggak mengikuti kontes kecantikan dengan alasan nggak sesuai dengan nilai-nilai budaya bangsa. "Mencari Yang Tercantik" [Searching for the Most Beautiful] Gadis*, no. 25/XXX/16 - 25 September 2003, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> *Putri Indonesia, diharuskan memiliki kriteria 3B, yaitu kombinasi antara Brain, Beauty dan Behavior. Pada pemilihan tahun ini, tercatat sebanyak 3 persen dari seluruh finalis punya titel S2.*



So Indonesia's non-participation in international beauty contests is compensated for by holding its own local pageants which do not objectify women in swimsuits, but do judge women in other traditional costumes. This example shows how fluid and yet, at the same time, how rigid gender constructions can be. It is fluid in practice but rigid in discourse. And, in both cases, western influence exists as a yardstick in the background.

It is interesting to see how sexuality is used as a mental partition board in differentiating the west and the local in the magazines. It is not only used to separate asexual female adolescents from sexual male adolescents, it is also used to establish an eastern identity by using sex as difference, as if to draw the line between good Indonesians and bad westerners. Notice in the above quotation how dressing sexy is attributed to the west, and how in the following quote the term "free-sex" keeps coming up as a western attribute as well:

Stuff that we don't have to copy [from the westerners]: their free culture and lifestyle (like free sex, etc.). For this kind of stuff, we have our own culture, lifestyle and personality, which I think is way cool. (Dilla Pratiwi) [female high school student of SMUN 6 in Surabaya]

But I think we don't have to imitate the way they [westerners] dress which is too revealing, or do drugs and free sex. (Nopriagis Cipta Ayu). [female high school student of SLTPN 1 in Gresik]

Things that we really shouldn't copy [from the westerners] are: Free sex, the way they dress, and their individualist attitude. (Arum Citra Lukitasari). [female high school student of SMU Ta'miriyah in Surabaya].<sup>39</sup>

When the magazines discuss female appearance, the west symbolizes progress and sophistication. In this case the west is constructed as an opposition, a difference or a bad example in order to fulfill the magazines' duty to uphold a public discourse that respects an invented traditional gender ideology.

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"*Mencari Yang Tercantik*" [Searching for the Most Beautiful] *Gadis*, no. 25/XXX/16 - 25 September 2003, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> *Yang nggak perlu ditiru: Budaya dan gaya hidup mereka yang serba bebas (seperti seks bebas, dll) Untuk yang ini kita sudah punya, kok, budaya dan gaya hidup serta kepribadian yang menurutku oke banget. (Dilla Pratiwi, SMUN 6 Surabaya).*

*Tapi menurutku kita nggak perlu mencontoh pakaian mereka yang terlalu terbuka, atau juga nge-drugs & free sex. (Nopriagis Cipta Ayu, SLTPN 1 Gresik).*

*Yang jangan banget ditiru adalah: Free sex, gaya pakaiannya, dan sikap individualis. (Arum Citra Lukitasari, SMU Ta'miriyah, Surabaya). *Gadis*. no. 27/XXX/7-16 October 2003.*



To define local gender ideology, the west is posited as the “other”, which is somewhat morally disagreeable but still understandable. “They” are behaving just they way they are because they are westerners. An article about Simon Webbe, a member of an English boyband called Blue, exemplifies this. In a gossip column it is revealed that Simon posed nude for a book:

Oops, you would never have thought that Simon Webbe posed in the nude for a book entitled ‘How to Behave in Bed’. Hmmm, from the title you can guess that this is an adult book. Especially with Simon’s pose and athletic dark body. But this is an educative book, though. Through Blue’s spokesperson, Simon admitted that he used to model before he was in the boyband with Duncan, Lee and Anthony. ‘It was a long time before he found fame in Blue,’ said the spokesperson. Regardless of how long ago he modeled for the book, Simon’s sexy pose is still a shock.<sup>40</sup>

The tone of the article does not express concern or disdain for the nude picture scandal. It treats the information lightly because the person involved is not Indonesian. Indonesian celebrities with this kind of scandal attached to their name would not be featured in the magazines. To do so would risk ruining the innocent and naive images of Indonesian female adolescents that the magazines try consistently to portray.

The discourse on sexuality presented in the magazines is rarely about the physical aspects of sex. In fact, the cultural package on sex is much denser than the biological knowledge. In addition to being punitive, sex education in the magazines also aims to instill shame and fear: fear of God, fear of parents and fear of social ostracism. The east and west that seem to merge in discourses about pop culture and pop appearance are detached and separated in the discourses on sex and sexuality. The separation of “east” and “west” serves as a character and identity builder by opposing Indonesian

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<sup>40</sup> Ups, beneran nggak nyangka deh kalau Simon Webbe ternyata pernah jadi model “blue” dalam buku *How to Behave in Bed*. Hmm, dari judulnya saja sudah ketahuan kalau buku ini buat konsumsi orang dewasa. Apalagi pose cowok keling bertubuh atletis ini asli sexy banget! Meski isi bukunya sendiri sebetulnya bersifat edukatif. Melalui juru bicara (jubir) Blue, Simon mengakui kalau dulu memang pernah jadi model sebelum gabung sama boy band beken ini, bareng Duncan, Lee, dan Anthony. “It was a long time before he found fame in Blue” [English words original] kata sang jubir. Tapi terlepas dari lama atau ngakunya pemotretan foto-foto dalam buku itu, pose sexy Simon tetap bikin shock! [English word original]. “Miss Gosip” *Gadis* no. 34/XXX/27 December 2002 - 6 January 2003, p. 118.



asexuality and morality to western sexuality and moral degeneracy. The result is a discourse of sexuality that is about anything but sex itself.

### **Conclusion**

Even though modernity and innocence do not always go hand-in-hand, the magazines negotiate the contradictory messages of a sophisticated western modernity and an innocent local identity by separating the discourses into fashion and entertainment on the one hand, and morality on the other. These contradictory messages may occur in a single issue although the anomaly is apparently lost on the readers. For example, in the article “Dress Sexy, Why Not”, the magazines chose responses from the readers that are mostly against wearing revealing outfits, despite the fact that the models in the magazines are presented in those kinds of outfits. The magazines do a good job of switching between the two discourses, embracing the west on the one hand, and upholding the local gender ideology without leaving a trace of treachery on the other. When the magazines are selling modernity they do not criticize local identity. However, when the magazines are fulfilling their task of upholding local identity, they are quick to vilify western influence as evil.

The dichotomy between the west and the east in the magazines creates two separate role models for adolescents to follow, each with a different function. The “western” physical appearance is the model performance and appearance for ideal Indonesian adolescent bodies; the “eastern” sets the ideal for social values that should be followed when it comes to morality and sexuality. The west is thus valorized as the ultimate global trend-setter without representing the local trends as examples of inferiority. The local eastern values on morality and sexuality are thus commended in explicit contrast to those of the immoral west. As a result, the adolescents in the magazines become homogeneous because their values follows the pattern of western modernity “guided” by local norms. These representations lump the adolescents into one homogeneous group. Any representation that differs from the standard presented in the magazines is not treated as the norm but as deviance.

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