

# A Discourse on Sexuality and Power in Two Indonesian Contemporary Movies

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## ABSTRACT

The restrictive discourse of sexuality; which is the result of the construction of knowledge and power regarding norms in Indonesian society, has made parents discipline the body/sexuality of their children. Sexuality is regulated by parents because it is feared that it can cause physical and moral damage to children. However, sex education in the family becomes problematic because discussions about sexuality are seen as taboo and inappropriate. This article aims to dismantle how sexuality is discussed, understood, and constructed in two Indonesian contemporary movies titled *Dua Garis Biru* (2019) and *Keluarga Cemara* (2019). These two films were analyzed by using Foucault's critical discourse analysis method which includes the discursive formation of power, knowledge, and discourse using the principle of *mise en scene*. The findings in this study indicate that the parents in the films exercise their power by carrying out disciplinary mechanisms such as prohibition and punishment as their ways to avoid talking about sexuality with their children. As a consequence, discourse about the taboo on sexuality raises a dilemma in the family. On the one hand, parents are expected to be the controller of children's sexuality, but on the other hand sexuality cannot be discussed in family institutions.

**Keywords:** *Disciplinary Power, Indonesian Movies, Power Relation in Family, Sexuality Discourse*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Attempts to study a subject which is regarded as a taboo in family is not an easy task. The topic of sex and sexuality is something that is avoided in family communication [1]. Although parents know the importance of discussing sexuality for children to understand, parents always feel reluctant to discuss this one point. Gao explained that taboo is implemented as a prohibited subject or evokes avoidance because it is perceived as harmful to members [2]. This problem is universal in the western and eastern world.

In Indonesian family, discussions about sexuality are not appropriate between children and parents) [3]. Parents regulate sexuality because they fear that it may cause children's physical and moral damage. In the family, the practice of sexuality is potentially dangerous for children. Deviant behavior in children in a non-procreative sexual form is given a new status, which is dangerous and contrary to the [4]. This discourse on sexuality is found in contemporary Indonesian movies, entitled *Dua Garis Biru* [5] and *Keluarga Cemara* [6].

These movies present taboo subjects that are not usually shown in the Indonesian family film. However, these movies received an overwhelming response from Indonesian audiences. Since its release on January 3, 2019, the film *Keluarga Cemara* [6] has received a total audience of 1,701,498. However, *Dua Garis Biru* [5] still held the most number as many as 2,538,363 in 46 broadcast days. The success of this film has become a

measure of the longing and needs of young people and parents for stories of families and adolescents that are close to everyday reality. *Keluarga Cemara* [6] is an adaptation of the famous serial children story entitled *Keluarga Cemara* [7] by Arsewendo Atmowiloto which was published during the New Order era. Unlike the previous adaptations, *Keluarga Cemara* [6], directed by Yandy Laurens, presents a modern family that must experience social changes and its challenges in the contemporary era. This film shows taboo things related to sexuality, such as menstruation in adolescents. Meanwhile, *Dua Garis Biru* [5], directed Ginatri S. Noer, shows two teenagers who practice premarital sexual practices. The interaction between family members in discussing sexuality makes these movies interesting and important to discuss.

*Dua Garis Biru* [5] and *Keluarga Cemara* [6] are relevant research objects to understand how power over sexuality runs through the smallest institutions, such as the family through parental power in viewing sexuality. Both discuss sexuality in accordance with the culture and moral discourse in Indonesian society. As extension of a culture, a family is regulated by and is expected to follow the social norms and values that dictate what is appropriate and normal in a culture [8]. Through discourses on sexuality created by families, children and adolescent's desires and behavior are regulated, controlled, and subdued [9]. This study aims to investigate the discourse on sexuality and power in the family as reflected in two contemporary Indonesian films

by looking into the narrative strategies and mise en scene in portraying the construction of sexuality and the power relation between parents and children around the discourse on sex.

Several studies have been conducted to investigate how the discourse of adolescent sexuality is developed by parents in the family [10] [11] [12] [1]. Previous studies discussing child and adolescent sexuality in Indonesian films and media have been carried out in relation to social and culture in Indonesia [13] [3] [14]. Then, there are also several studies that have analyzed the film corpus of *Dua Garis Biru* [5] and *Keluarga Cemara* [6] [15] [16] [17] which focuses on family values and the concept of youth, but no one has analyzed how the power of parents in controlling, subjugating, and regulating child sexuality, and how parents construct child sexuality in films directed to young people. So, this research will contribute to the discussion on the discourse of sexuality in contemporary Indonesian families.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on analyses of two Indonesian films: *Dua Garis Biru* [5] and *Keluarga Cemara* [6]. These films, henceforth abbreviated as DGB and KC, are selected because both films cover problems faced most by Indonesian family today which is sexuality discourse and can be taken as representative of Indonesian Contemporary films with family theme for young audiences. Each film portrays protagonists between 13-17 years old, a period when children grow up and turn into adolescents. The main characters of adolescents represent Indonesian teenagers who are often constructed as apolitical, passive and not critical thinking individuals, thus making them the object of socialization and education about morality by adults [3] [9].

Considering film as a text, this study employed a narrative strategies and cinematographic elements [18]. Afterward, the film's meaning was interpreted using Foucault's critical discourse analysis method, in this case within the framework of Foucault's theory of power. According to Foucault, the family constructs discourses about sexuality for children [19]. *The History of Sexuality* [20] shows the relationship between sex and power. Foucault explains that there is repression of the discourse on sex, but that repression encourages a counter discourse on sex itself. Furthermore, Foucault explained that efforts to control children and adolescents over sex form a new discourse about sex. These sexual discourses are legitimized by educational institutions and families by creating child sex pedagogies, including adolescents.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion will be divided into two parts. The first part will be about how sexuality is constructed in the films and the second part will discuss the discourse of sexuality and power in family as a social institution.

### 3.1. Construction of sexuality in Indonesian Movies

In common Indonesian traditional culture, discussions about sex/sexuality are still taboo to be discussed in front of children [20] [3]. Pakasi [21] explain that moral, socio-cultural and religious discourses have influenced the construction of adolescent sexuality. Consequently, education about sex for adolescents is not effective, or is even eliminated in social institutions [21]. This phenomenon is found in two contemporary Indonesian films, namely DGB and KC. Both build a discourse on sexuality that is taboo for discussion in society. Although the issue of sexuality/sex education appears to be more dominant in DGB films, one scene in the KC film is interesting to discuss because it also provides an overview of the construction of teenage sexuality in Indonesia.

There are two families featured in DGB [5], both have different views, values, and norms. Dara's family comes from the upper-middle class. They live in the formal urban residential area that is characterized by a more individualistic neighborhood. Both of Dara's parents work, so they have very limited time to closely supervise their children. Nevertheless, they believe that the education and success of their children take priority. They have confidence in their children's sensibility and responsibility for their own future. Thus, they expect their children to be able to take precautions in terms of their sexuality. In contrast, Bima's family comes from the lower middle class. They live in an urban kampung with its informal houses and overcrowded neighborhood. Bima's parents are relatively older than Dara's parents. His father has retired from his job and the family is supported by his meager pension that his mother has to sell food at the front part of their small house. Bima's parents are devout Muslims, and they believe in the traditional idea of marriage. They also expect Bima, their son, to do the right things because they think that they have taught him their religious norms and values. Thus, they assume their son understands the serious consequences of having pre-marital sex even though they never talk about it with him.

Contrasting environment and social status create different views and values between the two families. Dara's parents with her secular view allowed her children to have boyfriends. Instead of liberating, modern parents never provide sex education for their children. Meanwhile, Bima's religious mother strongly prohibit her son from having a girlfriend when talking about sex and premarital relationship. Bima's parents expect their son to know about sexuality and the dangers of premarital relationships even though they never talk about it with him. Other dialogue like, "Even though as a child, every kiss scene, mother always closed Bima's eyes." is evidence of how sexuality is constructed to her son. From childhood to adolescence, Mother treated Bima like a child and considered him as an asexual creature, so sexuality was called something dirty and had to be

hidden. In the framework of Foucault's [20] explanation, this scene reflects a discourse on sexuality which produces a normative understanding that sex is seems to be a taboo and an embarrassing issue to be openly discussed between parents and children.

In DGB film, the construction of sexuality raises a counter discourse carried by teenager figures. Bima and Dara who live close to urban areas have assumed that the dating trend is normal. In fact, the discourse of sexuality is no longer a taboo subject to be discussed and carried out. Holzner [22] reveals in his research that although Indonesian adolescents do not receive sexual education at home, they seek information from various sources. He continued, this fact shifts the discourse of sexuality into a necessity for teenagers in mature ways. This perception eventually builds a different construction of sexuality from the common discourse. However, the counter-discourse is problematic because they are not ready to experience the risks of premarital sex practices such as pregnancy. Instead of planning an abortion, they chose to keep their pregnancy and were prepared to take the risks. Thus, this phenomenon indicates that Dara and Bima trying to reconstruct and transform the norms adopted by society. Although there are counter-discourses to reconstruct the previous discourse in this film, the counterparts carried out by teenage figures are not comparable to the stereotypes that live in Indonesian culture. This has made discourse on taboo sexuality difficult to reconstruct.

The discourse on sexuality is considered taboo for adolescents because it is always associated with issues of reproduction/procreation [21]. Therefore, sex is only considered normal when they are married. These rules are normalized to eliminate the sexual instincts of adolescence until he is an adult. To normalize these rules, the institutions of medicine, education, psychiatry, psychology, religion have an interest in creating a discourse on child sexuality [19]. In this film, we find other institutions that also legitimize these rules, namely school institutions.

In educational institutions such as schools, teachers perceive sex as dangerous and threaten their students. In the normative discourse on sexuality, sexuality is disturbing to the future of the child. In addition, premarital sex and pregnancy outside of marriage are also considered a disgrace in society. For this reason, teachers feel obliged to guide and discipline their students in seeing sex when at school. In DGB film, the principal character disciplines by removing Dara from school when he finds out that his student is pregnant. Even though Dara and Bima had consensual premarital sexual practice, Dara was the one who was most disadvantaged. Pakasi [21] discloses research that young girl does not realize that risky sex has a greater impact on them socially, economically, and healthily.

Discourse on sexuality often appears together with discourse on morality. Dara was expelled from school because she was deemed incompatible with the discourse

of morality in society. The principal was afraid that other students would imitate the sexual practices of Dara and Bima. Free sex by both of them is considered a violation of morality and contrary to what is claimed to be a noble and civilized Indonesian culture. Therefore, discipline enforcement in the form of punishment is applied when children do not perform the expected actions in accordance with the norms and regulations that apply in the school or community environment. The penalties established by the school authorities are social penalties for violating school rules. In this film, school is like a place for power-knowledge games [4].

In this cut of the scene, the windows and curtains in blue are a symbol of dividing public and private spaces. When the curtains are open, UKS (school health Unit) is a public space. Students and students can look in from outside the window. However, when the Principal closes the curtains, the UKS turns into a private room and the sex information that other students see is cut off. In addition, the principal instructed Ibu Dara not to talk about the events of Dara's pregnancy in the public space. According to them, free sex and pregnancy are threats to adolescents because they can destroy adult expectations of adolescents [3]. Principal figures and staff feel they have the right to assist or distance students from matters related to sex.

Furthermore, discourse on body and sexuality is also influenced by religious views. Blackwood [23] explains that the Muslim community is an institution that produces a dominant discourse on sexuality in Indonesia. As a religious family, Bima's parents placed sexuality as something that could cause sin so that parents need to control their body and sexuality through the prohibition of premarital sex. Their Islamic values have produced a discourse that pre-marital sex or *zinah* are an unforgivable violation of ethics and morals. The discourse of knowledge of sin subjected the people to obeying religious rules. Therefore, Bima's parents feel guilty, sinful, and fail to educate their children who have violated these rules. He asked God to wash away his sins through the practice of worship; *sholat* and get married. Based on Islamic values, especially in Indonesian society, discourse on sexuality generally builds a narrative that sexual relations can only be carried out by married adult couples. Finally, this scene emphasizes that religious values have been internalized by the family as an important part of constructing sexuality in their lives.

Another example of the elimination of sex education for children can be found in the KC film. In one scene, the character of teenager experiences menstruation. Euis's character is described as having no prior knowledge of menstrual problems. This incident caused the character Euis to be confused and shocked when she first experienced the incident at school. The scene becomes more complex when the other students laugh at the incident. Menstruation ends up being something to be embarrassed about for girls. Thus, the values of sexuality related to the menstrual taboo become an obstacle to the

establishment of sexual education between adults and children/adolescents, either at school or at home [24].

This scene shows ambiguity in constructing a discourse on sexuality. On the one hand, menstrual markers are clearly exposed in the film with the appearance of bloodstains on Euis's skirt. The blood spots that were shown close-up when Euis stood in front of the class was an attempt to reconstruct menstruation which was considered taboo. This can be seen as a filmmaker breakthrough in bringing sexuality discourse to the audience. But on the other hand, this incident becomes more problematic when there is no information about menstruation in the sexuality education given by parents to Euis.

Although this film discusses sexuality such as menstruation, the discourse on sexuality in sex education is eliminated. Instead of showing changes in the female body through menstruation, hormonal issues related to women's sexuality have been resolved. The mother character in this film only explains the psychological problems (emotional maturity) associated with child maturity without explaining the part of sexual reproduction during menstruation. The characteristics of the Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) are also discussed minimally in the quote, "That's why mom is often grumpy when you are on period". Whereas, in the literature on family moral education, Hall [25] found that mothers are usually responsible for the sex education of their daughters. This shows that menstruation tends to be kept away from its biological reality. Sex education for girls in this film is not highlighted, especially regarding modern knowledge about women's reproductive rights, even though adolescents like Euis need to provide knowledge about biological, psychological, and psychosocial changes because of human development.

### **3.2. Discourse on sexuality and power in family institution**

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault [19] explains that the family is the gateway to the system of sexuality. Family, he continued, is the most important disciplinary institution in determining the circulation of discourse on sexuality to children. In the family, parents who are considered as partners of children can be the main actors of a system of sexuality. Foucault [19] explains that in the name of education, knowledge of sex in the family is an example of a discourse of power that reflects repressive power relations against child figures. Although parental power is not very visible in KC films, in DGB films, parents have a big role and influence in spreading discourse on sexuality within the family. To spread the discourse, repressive power relations appear to be more dominant in the film

In the DGB film, parents with modern views free Dara to practice dating and have love affair with boys. Mama in Dara's family agrees and accepts Bima and Dara's love affair. At first, mama showed permissiveness without disciplining sexuality in the family. As a mother,

the mama character believes in Dara's "maturity" and hopes that her child can fulfill her expectations. This expectation wants his child to seriously think about his future. Implicitly, the character Mama expects Dara to understand the risks of premarital sexual relations without meaningful teaching. As a modern family, the freedom given to children tends to foster a permissive attitude in Dara's family. This permissive attitude causes the absence of parental supervision of the child, which causes the child to not recognize the risks of premarital sexual practice.

Unlike the Dara family, the Bima family is represented as a religious family with a traditional view. Bima's parents are middle-aged couples who are often presented with Islamic religious identities such as hijab and Muslim clothes. As a Muslim who is obedient to worship, religious discourse affects the disciplinary mechanism in the family. They hope that Bima does not approach things that are damaging to his child's future, such as drugs. In addition, Bima was taught not to date or have close female friends without being given further explanation. The disciplinary mechanism through this prohibition is also the result of moral and ethical constructs which they think is correct. Parents, especially Ibu Bima exercise their power by prohibiting them to train children to behave in accordance with the norms that have been constructed by social and religious beliefs, even though mother never explains the risks, values and norms related to sexuality to the child. The discourse on sexuality education aimed at preventing 'free sex' is in line with the findings of Holzner and Oetomo [22] that sexuality education that has been implemented in Indonesian families is a discourse of prohibition.

When prohibition is not effective in disciplining children, Bima's mother adopt other disciplinary mechanisms such as scolding children who have broken family rules. This is evidenced by the scolding and accusation of Mother to Bima at the dinner table, "Are you dating? I have told you many times, you shouldn't do that, it ends up like this." The disciplinary mechanism carried out by parents can be seen as an effort to internalize teachings that are in accordance with family and social norms, so that they are expected to be applied in Bima's daily interactions. Thus, home and family become disciplinary spaces to create obedient children. Mother's reprimand and scolding also attempts to prevent the Bima character from repeating it, even though in fact Bima has been engaging in premarital sexual activity. Bima secretly defied his parent's rules and prevented the disciplinary mechanism from working.

The disciplinary mechanism indicates that the child in the family becomes an object that must be controlled. Taking pictures with medium shot techniques, objective camera viewpoints, and dim lighting suggest Bima's helplessness. Bima's character is on the right side of the picture which makes the audience pay more attention. Bima's visualization in the public space places Bima in the object's position because of the gesture of Bima's face that is looking down, while the gesture of the character of

the Mother who is facing Bima seems to be intimidating and making a judgment. With a threatening tone, the character Mother utters the sentence, "I better just pass out." as a way to provoke Bima's response. However, Bima answered with a high intonation and a snapping tone, "NO!", accompanied by Bima's tears. This shows that Bima was depressed by the questions that Mother addressed him. The repressive interactions of child and parent figures lead to the dominance of parental figures as teachers, in control of discipline, and supervisors of the attitudes and behavior of child figures so that they are in accordance with the morals and ethics expected by parents. The unexpected response by the mother was also expressed because Bima was afraid and guilty because of the mistakes he had done.

Repressive behavior is also shown by the character Mama Dara when her child does not fulfill her hopes and expectations. Mama Dara conveyed such deep disappointment when her child was pregnant. According to mama, premarital sex, pregnancy, and married by accident will destroy her child's future. Mama's disappointment can be seen in the sentence, "I think I can count on you, you can think for yourself, so what can you do this, Dar?". through her downward gesture, Mom's questions and her intimidating attitude made Dara weak, afraid, guilty in Dara. Next, Mama punished Dara by throwing her out of the house. This punishment can be seen as a form of parental discipline mechanism [26].

The phenomenon of premarital sex practice experienced by Dara and Bima can be read as a form of resistance to the power of norms internalized by parents in family institutions. Resistance in this corpus occurs because of a mismatch between the wishes of the child and the expectations/rules of the parents. Haryatmoko [4] explains that violation of norms by teenagers is an expression of protest against the prohibition of sex by parents not being discussed openly in the family. The taboo against sexuality makes the practice of premarital sex a form of resistance for children [4]. In addition, Dara and Bima do other methods of resistance, such as avoiding the power of family institutions by hiding dating practices, premarital sex practices, and Dara's pregnancy.

However, child character resistance did not occur significantly. Mother characters have succeeded in internalizing discourses on sexuality, morals and religion through their advice. Parent's advice to their children continuously makes children internalize their teachings and immediately practice it [13]. The advice of the two mothers in these families can also be viewed as an effort to show power and strengthen the power relation between the child and the parents. This power legitimizes the mothers in controlling the child's life. The modern and intellectual Mama Dara wants her daughter to fix her future by continuing education in South Korea. Meanwhile, the religious Ibu Bima wants her son to be responsible for what he has done by getting married. Parents in the family think that they are the right person to fix the child's problems. Both parents in these families perpetuate the discourse that premarital sexuality is a

mistake and must be corrected with their own way. Finally, the child character obeys the wishes of the parents. The depiction of the obedient child reflects parental knowledge and legitimizes parental power. The existence of a power relation in the film makes it difficult for all child characters to escape from parental domination.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Two conclusions can be drawn from the findings above. First, the family is the most important disciplinary institution in determining the circulation of discourse about taboo sexuality to children. This discourse keeps parents from providing sex education in the family. There are external aspects such as religion and educational institutions which legitimize "normal" sex to support this discourse's construction. To reconstruct the discourse on sexuality taboos, the child figures carry a counter-discourse that considers adolescent sexuality as a common thing. These counterparts provide space for the audience to criticize and "undermine" the discourse of sexuality that produces a normative understanding that sex is not appropriate for discussion in the family. Thus, there is ambiguity in presenting sexuality in these films, including discourse that accommodates conservative or normative sexuality (sexual conservatism) and a discourse on liberating sexuality (sexual liberalism).

Second, discourse on sexuality in these contemporary movies voice criticism of the view that positions children as inferior parties and parents as superior parties who want children to be by social and religious norms. As superior parties, parents prohibit them without explaining the risk of premarital sexual practice to discipline their children. The prohibition can be seen as a means of controlling adolescent sexuality. When this disciplinary mechanism is violated, the parents give scolding and punishment. In contrast, as inferior parties, children's resistance did not last long. Even though children have knowledge and can have an opinion about sexuality, they are still obedient children. When children internalize what their parents talk about, they unconsciously follow the control discourse created in the family. With this mechanism the power is continuously reproduced.

#### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Nella Putri Giriani and Dhita Hapsarani. The first draft was written by Nella Putri Giriani. Review, supervision, and editing were performed by Dhita Hapsarani. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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