

The Contested Meanings of Female Sexualities through Alternative Interpretations of Thai Television Series among Young Female Audiences in Urban Chiang Mai, Thailand

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Abstract

In opposite to most studies of youth media consumption which have usually approached them from the perspective of adulthood as well as downplayed a youth-centered interaction and their actual interpretations, this paper aims to explore various ways female youth audiences in urban Chiang Mai actively negotiated the conventional sexual discourse of female sexuality in famous Thai television series *Dok Som See Thong* (2011) and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* (2013). Drawing on a four-year audience ethnographic study among thirteen female teenage audiences, this paper investigates various tactics how female youth-as active audiences-made sense of, negotiated, or even resisted the conventional discourse on female sexuality conveyed through media messages they encountered in everyday life. With a great respect to female youth agencies, this paper therefore suggests that young female audiences are not passive receptors of gender and sexual discourses conveyed through various social institutions-especially mass media messages. These female teenagers obviously demonstrated their ability to appropriate, transform or reproduce those popular series messages for their own meanings.

Keywords: Female Youth, Sexuality, Audience, Ethnography, Television Series

***Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*: The Introduction**

Dok Som See Thong and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* were two Thai television drama series concerned with women and youth sexuality that were popularly consumed and were debated throughout Thailand due to their controversial stories.

Dok Som See Thong (Golden Orange Blossom) was a sixteen episode long Thai television series broadcasted two days a week every Wednesday and Thursday at 8.30 p.m. from 18 March to 19 May 2011 on Channel 3, a free television channel. According to research participants, the title, *Dok Som See Thong*, was supposedly adapted from the Thai word '*dok thong*' (golden flower or golden blossom) that is widely used as a slang insulting a woman who has multiple sexual partners. According to Taitao Sucharitkul, the author of the original novel that the series was based on:

“When it comes to afternoon and evening time, orange blossoms are not always white. Having been under sunlight until late afternoon and evening, they become yellow. This is a background of the title. Some audiences might think too far. It is fine because the main character is a little bit like that.”
[be sexually-spoiled or has multiple sexual partners] (Judprakai, 2011)

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Figure 1 PR poster of *Dok Som See Thong* with a Caption
 “Being Under (Sexually) Lustful, She Will be Burned from Inside”

Dok Som See Thong is a Thai television drama portraying a life story of Reya, a sexual liberated and ambitious young woman who was born in a working class family. Since she was a little girl, Reya was under the environments dominated by absolute patriarchy where males were acknowledged as leaders of the family and breadwinners, but women were relegated as housewives and were expected to be responsible for household chores. She was totally frustrated about her lower status and was looked down upon by the surrounding higher-class people. Reya always dreamed of raising her status to be part of the higher society. When Reya grew up, she became beautiful and sexually attractive. Driven from a high ambition, she accomplished her feats by using her beauty and female sexuality. She was willing to be a minor wife of several men to raise her social and financial statuses. In the end, Reya was labeled for not being a good wife and mother since she had multiple sexual relationships.

While broadcasting, the widespread popularity of this controversial Thai series was reflected by the Google search for the word “*Dok Som See thong*” (ดอกส้มสีทอง in Thai) with more than 3,780,000 hits. The search term “*Reya Dok Som See Thong*” (เรยา ดอกส้มสีทอง in Thai) had more than 1,380,000 hits. Moreover, 700,000 posts on Facebook mentioned this series (Bangkokbiznews, 2011a). However, a group of concerned parents requested the Ministry of Culture to ban *Dok Som See Thong* since Reya, the main character, was considered an inappropriate role model for young people. In the show, Reya was aggressive towards her mother, had affairs with other women’s husbands, as well as engaged in multiple sexual scenes. As a result, Channel 3 and the series producing team were warned by Ministry of Culture to be aware of improper content and to censor any inappropriate scenes (Bangkokbiznews, 2011b). Afterwards, the TV program classification of this series increased from PG13 to PG18 and *Dok Som See Thong* became extremely popular due the strict media censorship, and the resulting media attention. Unlike other Thai television dramas, at the end of the last episode, the four minute dharma teaching by V.Vajiramedhi, regarding the ways to be critical and literalized in watching the controversial *Dok Som See Thong* was broadcasted.

Meanwhile, *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* (Stress and Storm) was broadcasted weekly on Saturday at 10 p.m. between 18 May and 24 August 2013 via GMM One satellite channel, GMM One channel’s website, GMM One iOS application, and Youtube where each episode was viewed more than one million times. The series portrayed the unique lifestyles of a group of middle-class Grade 11 schoolgirls and boys in urban Bangkok. The story of this series explored controversial issues among teenagers in modern Thai society such as youth sexual relationship in school, homosexuality, smoking, drinking, violence, unplanned pregnancies, and other issues of high school boys and girls. The series was mentioned all over the social media too. The Twitter hash tag #HormoneTheSeries dominated the Twitter airwaves every Saturday nights during its broadcast (Editorial, 2013).

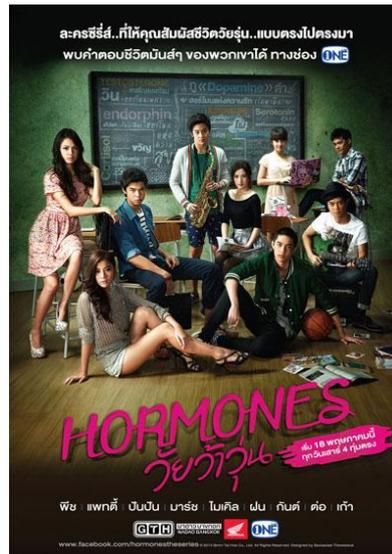


Figure 2 PR poster of *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*

Despite not being broadcasted via free television channels, the series was very popular and was wildly criticized in Thai society for its controversial content. Like the previous case of *Dok Som See Thong*, *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* received feedbacks that were mostly positive by younger audiences for its up-to-date storyline and production quality. However, conservative viewers criticized the show for various scenes such as youth having sex, smoking, and bullying in school. As a result, the series producing team was summoned by the members of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications commission (NBTC) to be informed that those scenes would likely to violate the public morality and the Public Broadcasting Act. The show also led to a wide discussion in national level regarding sensitive issue about media censorship in Thailand (Reporter, 2013).

In spite of notorious stories and multiple sexual scenes, the young female audiences revealed that these two television series played an important role to promote the conventional, hegemonic model of Thai feminine gender/sexuality. The young female audiences' interpretations were also multiple and full of contradictions. Regarding young female audiences' interactions with television drama series, this paper explores the interplay between the series' texts and how these texts were actively re-appropriated and made meaningful by the young female audiences in their everyday lives (de Certeau, 1988; Fiske, 1989). They energetically engaged with and talked about the series' texts and concepts that are offered to them. However, they did not necessarily pick up from these series' messages that the producers wanted them to pick up; the received text can be quite different from that of the original text. Young female audiences' media consumption was thus a productive and transformative process, intimately tied to the appropriation and conversion of meanings.

Methodologies and Fieldwork Process: Getting Involved with Young Female Audiences

Audience anthropology provides techniques for researcher to enter the consumption practices of media and popular culture to participate, observe, and then describe the ways in which it makes sense for those within it (Hinviman, 1999; Moores, 1993). Therefore, audiences are recognized as active consumers rather than passive recipients (Hall, 1997). To understand the young female audiences' active interpretations of their television series viewing, audience anthropology reveals the ways young female audiences—who are subordinated and marginalized by the conventional sexual discourse and patriarchy of Thai

society—are not passive victims. Instead, they are active television drama consumers who are constantly re-appropriating or resisting the media texts by giving them their own meanings (de Certeau, 1988; Fiske, 1989). The data of this paper was collected from participating with thirteen young female audiences aged 18-21 years as well as involving in their online social media groups over a long period of time. Concerning the young female audience interpretations, especially the television drama viewing among women, positioning and the gender of the researcher is obviously crucial (Hobson, 1982). In addition to the way the researcher positioned himself as an openly gay man and one member of the girl group, becoming a fan of both *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* like them greatly contributed to confidence among the young female audiences who expressed their experiences, pleasures, interpretations, or critiques toward the series to the researcher as another friend in a relatively open way.

The researcher first began his fieldwork in one public school located in an urban area. After submitting an official letter from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Chiang Mai University to the school administration, approval was obtained and preliminary fieldwork was carried out from June 2009 to March 2010. The ethnographic method was conducted during the period of April 2010 to April 2014, when the research participants were in their last year of high school and transitioning to various universities. For collecting data as accurate as possible, participant observation, informal conversations and in-depth interviews were conducted among young female audiences. In order to conduct the study following ethical principles, the consent to the fieldwork was obtained from all participants and their parents after the purpose and process of the study were explained to them. All research participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned instead of their real names. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from participating in this study at any moment without consequence.

Dok Som See Thong was broadcasted when the research participants were during their last year of high school. The morning after watching the series on Wednesday and Thursday nights, particular scenes and storyline of *Dok Som See Thong* had broadcasted the night before were usually frequent topics of their conversation when they were gathering at the convenience store before entering the school and during break times. While *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* was broadcasting, the girls were in the second year in universities. The data from this part was collected when they gathered at various places such as school, coffee shops, universities, or nightclubs. Informal discussions also often erupted among the girl group in Facebook and online chatting applications.

Watching *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*: The Contested Interpretations of Female Sexuality

According to Van Fleet's study of the female television drama series (*la korn nam now*) viewers in urban Chiang Mai, through the process of consumption, she found that television viewers have the opportunity to take what they see in the series and make it their own. The consumption lies the possibility of subversion and resistance, if even in small ways like homogenization and compliance (Van Fleet, 1998). In the case of young female audiences in this paper, their various interpretations of *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* also demonstrated how they actively interpreted popular television drama series in their everyday lives, especially as the way of exploring and negotiating notions of female sexuality against the ideal type of young women—the *kunlasatree* model—in contemporary Thai society.

Good Girl VS Bad Girl: The Controversial Images of Female Sexualities

Since female gender and sexuality were the main topics in *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*, young female audiences actively critiqued the ways these two series portrayed the controversial images of the main female characters. While *Dok Som See Thong* aired, there was the episode where Reya offered herself to be a minor wife of Sintorn in exchange for the flight attendant position. This caused a commotion among many of the show's audiences. That night while watching the series together with Facebook to check reactions regarding this scene, the researcher found that Jill (pseudonymous) posted: *"I believe that Reya is a good woman. I don't care what people are thinking about her. If I were her, I would do the same."* Her status received many 'likes' from her friends as well as several comments in agreement with her perspective. During the group of young female audiences' conversation the next morning, Jill emotionally criticized the social trend which labeled Reya as being a "bad role model" to female youth for losing her virginity in exchange for her career. Jill still insisted that she would do the same if she were Reya. Other girl group members were likely to agree with Jill's perspective when she explained that Reya was publicly labeled as a sexual-spoiled women (*jai taak*), but those people did not realize that Reya had a very difficult time when she was a child. Jill explained further how Reya's mother were heavily abused and exploited from their master's family (which represented a patriarchal control power). Her master's family insulted her for her poor background and undesirable physical appearance. Being a servant's daughter, she did not have the privilege of access to any economic, social, and cultural capital; she had no money, no power, and inadequate education. The only things she had were her virginity and her beauty. Jill called Reya an "underdog" (*ma jon trok*); while her mother and other servants were obedient, at least Reya dared to stand up and fight against the way she and her mother were being exploited. Agreeing with Jill, Tina added: *"If Reya was obedient like her mother, she would be a servant forever. No way she could become a flight attendant like this."*

From the conversation with the group of young female audiences, I recognized what Reya said that: *"Female beauty has its price; I can exchange my beauty for anything I want."* Research participants actively interpreted the series storyline they had just watched and re-appropriated it to understand and criticize situations they faced in everyday life. The character 'Sprite', the sexually-liberated high schoolgirl in *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* also created a huge panic in Thai society. Many conservative audiences thought that Sprite was a "bad role model" for female youth because several scenes portrayed her having sex in a school uniform with many male students in the classroom and school toilet. The social trend expressed concern that female youth would imitate Sprite's 'inappropriate' sexual behavior by having premarital sex which would lead to the spread of HIV/AIDS, other sexual transmitted diseases, or unwanted pregnancies.

In opposite to the social panic among adults, research participants expressed admiration toward Sprite; this contrasted with other characters that were publicly praised as well-behaved girls. Cindy (pseudonymous) opined that although most of her female friends did not have as many sexual acquaintances as Sprite had, this female character represented the sexual life style of many schoolgirls she knew. According to Cindy, this character is considered as being more 'human' than other characters. In celebrating female sexuality, Sprite realized that she was beautiful. Most of male students went after her because of her beauty. Knowing that, she utilized her beauty and her female sexuality as she wanted. Most of the research participants supported the way Cindy thought about Sprite. Nancy (pseudonymous) added that female beauty should be valued; Nancy felt that she was very fortunate to be born a woman. So far, she could utilize her beauty to earn extra money from

being a *pretty* (product presenter), attending modeling contests, and even reviewing various beauty products for women to sell them online.

Meanwhile, Vicki (pseudonymous) insisted that by being a beautiful female, she could win several beauty queen competitions. After she was crowned a beauty queen, she had a busy schedule due to several social events and she said: *“If I wasn’t born a woman, I would never have a good life like this.”* Arguing against the controlling of her female sexuality, Nancy interestingly said that she believed that her beauty would not stay with her forever. Her beauty had a lot of value for her, but she really wondered why adults (especially teachers and parents) did not want her to be beautiful. So far they did everything to prevent her from being beautiful. In the meantime, Rose (pseudonymous) expressed her satisfaction towards the scene where Sprite was about to have sex with a junior student in a science lab. However, she finally kicked him off refusing to have sex with him saying: *“I am also in the mood [for having sex with you]. But if you don’t have a condom, you will never do it”* which led to a very popular phrase widely circulated among young people that: *“If you want to drink Sprite, you must use a bag [condom]”* (ja kin Sprite tong sai thung). According to Rose, she always criticized of the scenes forbidding young people—especially female—from having sex since they contradicted her belief and sexual lifestyle. Being sexual-liberated, Rose especially admired the positive message of how young women could negotiate sexual practices by using condoms with male partners. Like Sprite, Rose assured me that she always practiced safe sex by using condoms appropriately every time she had a sexual relationship with her boyfriends. Rose compared Sprite to another character, Dao, who was over protected and always under a strictly parental control by her mother; being overprotected and not being prepared with sexual issues, Dao had an unexpected sexual relationship and had no idea how to protect herself.

The ways research participants interpreted *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* were to criticize conventional social norms regarding hegemonic female gender and sexuality in Thai society. In the case of *Dok Som See Thong*, the character of Naruedee, a major wife of Reya’s second husband, was heavily criticized among them. Amy (pseudonymous) said that she saw enough of the stereotype of ‘well-behaved women’ in Thai television series where women were faithful to their husbands. Moreover, Thai television series repetitively portrayed ‘desirable’ woman characteristic as being submissive to any situations she faced. In the case of Naruedee, she chose to be quiet and let her husband have Reya as his minor wife without any argument. Amy said that: *“I was so annoyed with E-khun Dee [the way she called Naruedee’s nick name in an insulting way]. If I were her, I would never be stupid like that.”* Robin (pseudonymous) added that if she behaved like Naruedee in the series, she would lose her husband for sure. But in the series, it followed the conventional Thai drama storyline that Naruedee was born in an elite family. Her father was a consulate to Thailand in Paris. She was born in a high profile family and had a privilege compared to Reya. Meanwhile, Reya had to do everything to lift up her status from being a servant’s daughter who was constantly looked down by surrounding people when she was a child. According to Amy, she said: *“If I behaved like Naruedee too much, I think I could not do anything for sure (mai thun dai dake).”*

Sexual Double Standard: The Superiority of Man over Woman

Obviously, the superiority of man over woman and the idea of patriarchy were heavily critiqued among young female audiences. Most of them questioned why men were allowed to have minor wives while women were not. In contrast, women were obligated to protect their virginity more than their own lives since they were taught that their virginity represented their

greatest dignity. If they lost their virginity, that meant they were not worthy enough to be “good women” or ideal wives and mothers. No male would desire and respect any woman who lost her virginity. During lively conversations about *Dok Som See Thong* in the morning before the national anthem ritual at the school, Tina (pseudonymous) expressed her frustrations for “Jao Sua”—the main male character who was the Sino-Thai millionaire and was the owner of the house where Reya’s mother worked—for being able to have five wives who all stayed together in the same house. Once, he was told that his third wife was likely to having an affair with another male. Without any proof about whether she really had an affair or not, she was thrown to her death into a deep well behind the house. No one dared to argue Jao Sua’s fatal decision. Moreover, his fourth wife, who was a teenager, secretly fell in love with Jao Sua’s oldest son. Even though her feelings were never discovered since she kept it to herself, she finally went crazy for the rest of her life. Additionally, some male characters had minor wives that were considered a misdeed. However, they were eventually forgiven by their major wives and families.

In contrast, any woman who lost her virginity and had more than one sexual partner was ostracized and would never be forgiven. Rose, one of the sexually liberated research participants, also mentioned various scenes which, according to her, were not fair for women who were forced to preserve their virginity while men were allowed to enjoy sexual experiences. For example, Raya’s mother constantly taught her daughter that virginity was the ultimate woman’s value; if she lost her virginity, she would not be worthy enough to be a good woman. Meanwhile the first wife of Jao Sua taught her daughter-in-law that a woman’s ultimate value was to be an honest wife for her husband and a perfect mother for her children. Another heart-breaking character for Rose was Jao Sua’s fifth wife. Born and raised in America, she believed that all human beings were the same, man or woman. Disagreeing, Jao Sua yelled at her that she was in Thai society and those rules were no longer applied. According to this society, women were considered ‘used’ if they already had a sexual relationship. Disagreeing with Jao Sua’s premise, she argued that if she was considered ‘used’, Jao Sua was also considered ‘used’ as well since he also had many sexual relationships. Jao Sua angrily replied by firmly insisting that in Thai society, men were superior to women and Thai men could have multiple sexual partners without being considered as ‘used’. In contrast, women would be automatically labeled as being ‘used’ once they had their first sexual relationships. Among enthusiastic discussions regarding these scenes, Nancy concluded in her perspective that: “*That’s why I prefer being a bian [lesbian]*” (according to research participants, having sexual relationship with members of the same gender were not considered as ‘losing a virginity’ (*sia tua*) because it could not result in pregnancy)

While *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* was being aired, many research participants shared a satirical picture that criticized the series’ storyline of portraying the double standard between Win, a main male character, and Sprite, a main female character. The picture presented below was originated from the Facebook public page “*Manee Mee Nom*” (Manee Who Has Big Breasts). It was widely shared and received many ‘likes’ from young fans. Many of them also criticized the double standard between male and female sexuality portrayed in the series. In the series, Win was a huge playboy in school. He could get any girls he wanted and had many sexual partners, including Sprite. From his actions, Win was acknowledged as an idol in the school. He was popular and desired by the young female audiences. One scene a male junior student approached Win and said: “*You are my hero* [as being a playboy and having sex with several women, including a female teacher].” In contrast, Sprite was labeled by students in the school as a ‘slut’ (*rat*: a rhinoceros in Thai meaning, is a slang widely used to insult a woman who is sexually-liberated) due to the way she had multiple sexual partners. Some of her girlfriends refused to continue their friendships with her. Once she was caught by other

students for having sex with a junior male student in a science lab (which she refused to do so since the male student did not bring a condom at that time), Sprite became the subject of gossip from this situation. One of her previous boyfriends called her ‘slut’ when he found out that she had a sexual relationship with another male student. Many males then misunderstood that they could have sex with Sprite easily once she accepted a date with them or even allowed them to send her home. Due to social pressure, Sprite finally realized that she was “unvalued” as she told her mother.

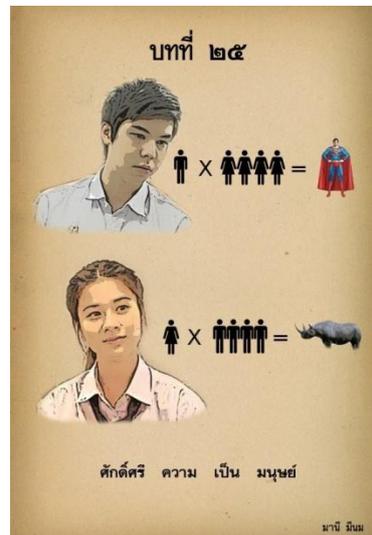


Figure 3 The parody picture criticizing the sexual double standard between male and female characters in *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*

Double standards between male and female sexuality was continually critiqued among young female audiences. In the scene after Dao had unplanned and unprotected sexual relationship with her boyfriend, she had to deal with various consequences on her own, while the young man did not have any shared responsibility. In addition to the internal guilt she felt for losing her virginity to a young man she had met recently, Dao had to protect herself from possible unwanted pregnancy by searching for information, buying emergency contraceptive pills, and going to an illegal abortion clinic by herself. In the series, Dao attempted to buy emergency contraceptive pills in a drug store. While there, a female pharmacist heavily criticized her for having a sexual relationship and asking for emergency contraceptive pills while being a student. That female pharmacist continued insulting Dao about whether her parents would feel ashamed by the way she misbehaved. “*You are bad! Indeed!*”: a female pharmacist said to Dao before selling her pills and providing instruction. Emma (pseudonymous) laughed at this scene saying that, in a real life some of her girlfriends could go to a drug store and ask for pills without being blamed by the buyers. “*Mostly they ask kateoy (transvestite) friends to buy for them because they usually go to buy contraceptive pills or intravenous injections for themselves almost every month (some kateoy youth took contraceptive pills or intravenous injections believing that they could make their body more feminine by obtaining female hormones contained in the drugs). They also know very well where they can buy this stuff and the store owners who are willing to sell to them.*”

Another controversial scene was when Dao imagined that if she were pregnant, all of her friend would leave her and the school would force her to resign. Since pregnancy would also ruin the school’s reputation, she would be expelled and her parents would be terribly disappointed. Dao therefore decided to go to an illegal abortion clinic. The series portrayed the abortion clinic a scary place with dreadful conditions. Dao saw a young woman undergoing an abortion before facing an excessive miscarriage and bleeding all over the clinic

floor. Rose called this scene ‘over’ (exaggerated) arguing that a storyline of this episode was intended to frighten young people from sexual relationships by warning them that they would face these severe problems, which “*It’s not true*” according to Rose and other young female audiences’ perspectives. Disagreeing with the series, Rose shared her opinion that she knew some of her girlfriends who had unplanned pregnancies while they were in high schools and vocational schools. Most of those young women decided to terminate their pregnancy because they could not raise a child while studying. Those girls could find proper and safe medical services in private clinics and hospitals in Chiang Mai City. They could definitely come back to study like nothing had happened before. One of Rose’s friends decided to continue her pregnancy despite being in grade twelve while being six months pregnant because she had a good supportive system at home. However, she was very unfortunate that her parents were invited to meet with school officials and the school ‘politely asked her to resign from the school’. Those school officials claimed that they were concerned that her classmates would not accept their daughter because of her pregnancy. Very disappointed with the school decision, her parents, however, accepted the offer to expel her from the school. In contrast to the school’s prediction, her friends rallied to her cause after they heard that the school had asked her to resign. Although teachers constantly used this girl as an example to teach other students that unplanned pregnancy while studying could ruin their future, all of her classmates continually went to visit her until she delivered her baby. On the delivering day, most of her classmates went to visit her to congratulate her and her new baby at the hospital. Despite being expelled when she was in grade twelve, after delivering her baby, the girl enrolled to study in non-formal education system and finally graduated high school at almost the same time as her friends. She then continued her study at a university and had outstanding grades. After telling this story, Rose expressed her opinion that each girl had her own way of life. However, she was forced on to the only one path paved by adults. Anyone who refused to follow that path would be criticized and punished for being wrong and disobedient.

Perfection and Happiness Are Totally Different: Alternative Types of Family and Parenting Style

Several types of family and parenting style were also important topics of conversation among the group members. They reflected on their own families and their parents’ parenting styles by comparing to those families portrayed in *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*. Dao’s and Sprite’s families, which represented two opposite family types, were actively discussed by Kim (pseudonymous), who was raised in a broken home but understanding single father. Rose, Emma, and Robin (pseudonymous), who belonged to highly controlled families, also discussed these issues. In the series, Sprite’s mother was a single mother. Her mother was very understanding and willing to listen to Sprite’s problems. Especially concerning sexual issues, Sprite was provided a high level of freedom to have relationships with male partners. In return, Sprite gave her mother a sexual freedom as well. They could talk to each other about anything, including their sexual activities and protection. According to Sprite, her mother perfectly played roles as her mother, father, and friend who she could wholeheartedly rely on. Sprite’s good relationship with her mother led to high self-confidence and she never felt a lack of love or understanding from her mother. On the contrary, Dao was raised in a family in line with the conventional style of the ‘perfect family.’ She had both a father and mother who loved her and valued her education. Her mother drove her to the school and picked her up from extra tutorial classes after school no matter how late at night. Every night, her mother always brought her a glass of milk and gave her a good night kiss. Despite the appearance of perfection of Dao’s family, she always felt that she was under the strictest parental control, especially by her mother. Her mother managed every detail of her life: what

extra classes she should have studied, what kind of clothing she should have worn, what kind of friend she could spend time with, and even what time she should have gone to bed. When she had a friend of the opposite gender, that young male was closely inspected by her mother so that Dao was allowed to continue her friendship with that particular young man. Dao was both sexually attracted to the young man and strictly repressed by her mother. When Dao had an unexpected sexual experience, she did not know how to protect herself very well.

Discussing these two opposite styles of family in the series, Rose expressed her opinion that: *"My mom is really like Dao's mom."* She added that the more she watched Dao's family, the more she thought about her family. Similar to Dao's family in the series, Rose's family had the appearance of a warm and perfect family. Her parents were in a stable financial status; full of love and prioritizing her daughter's education, Rose's mother thus strictly controlled her daughter. While Rose believed her mother cared about her, the mother's actions made Rose feel like she lacked freedom.

Even Sprite's family was not in line with the conventional style of family that consisted of a father and mother living together in harmony. According to Rose, she felt 'jealous' of Sprite for having an understanding mother who listened to her problems, despite an imperfection of her family. Rose reflected her feelings by saying that: *"perfection and happiness are totally different."* That meant although her family was perfect according to the ideal family pattern, she was not happy since she was always under her parents' strict control. After that, Kim told the researcher that after listening to Rose complained about her controlling family, Kim felt very fortunate to have an understanding father. Even though she was raised in a single-parent family and her father did not stay with her, at least her father always understood, trusted in her, and gave her a certain level of freedom. She was very comfortable talking about anything with her father. Unlike Kim, Rose was expected to behave in front of her parents in a manner that was totally different from the way she really did with friends. Since she was one of Rose's best friends, Kim assured that when Rose faced any problem in her life, her parents would be the last persons with whom she would choose to talk to.

State-Led Media Control and Television Censorship Measure: "Who Cares!"

As mentioned, these two series were wildly criticized in Thai society for their controversial content and various inappropriate scenes, especially those associated with sexual issues. Certain groups believed these scenes could violate public morality and proposed that the networks censor these inappropriate scenes. Especially in the case of *Dok Som See Thong*, its classification was increased from PG 13 to PG18 after aired for a while due to the strict media censorship. Moreover, the parent association proposed that the air time of this series should be postponed from its regular time at 8.30 p.m. to 'late at night' or possibly 'banned' in order to protect young people from inappropriate content portrayed in the series (Bangkokbiznews, 2011b). This made the strict media censorship a mainstream social debate while these two series were being broadcasted.

"Who cares?" Jill swore when the researcher asked the young female audience group members how they thought about the censorship measure against *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*. *"No one cares about that television program classification system!"* According to research participants' lifestyle, the measure of television program classification system did not have any effect on their television viewing behavior. In today's world, youth audiences rarely watched television programs in the living room together with their parents; they prefer watching television drama series via Youtube in their private spaces, especially in their bedrooms. *"It's more private* [watching series via Youtube in her

bedroom]. *I feel awkward while watching love scenes with my parents and my mother told me not to act like that*”: Robin stated. Emma added that: *“I haven’t watch TV with my parents for a long time. And we don’t take it [the television program classification system] seriously because no matter what classification it is, we will still watch it on Youtube anyway.”*

Regarding national debate on controversial content and various ‘inappropriate’ sexual scenes of two series, all research participants expressed their disagreement and wondered why adults were panic about these issues. Tina said: *“Why do they [adults] want to forbid us from knowing this stuff? I think the real situation is more than what they watched in the series.”* Kim added that: *“Why do they display captions warning us that it’s not appropriate for young people [drinking, smoking, having a sexual relationship, etc.]? They might think that when we see that caption, we would not do that stuff. The more they forbid us, the more we want to do it!”* Jill then shared her opinion that:

“Some adults have a narrow world (loke kape). They see us as always being a child. They don’t know that we know something more than they do. They always believe they know more than us and forbid us from whatever they think they know the best. Like they forbid us to watch porn, but they don’t know that we can download porn very easy for free in the Internet. Do they know that we share porn with each other on social media? If you want, I can transfer to your phone right now.”

As mentioned previously, there was a four minute dharma teaching by V.Vajiramedhi, regarding the ‘appropriate’ ways to watch *Dok Som See Thong*, which aired at the end of the last episode. The next morning while the group members gathered in the school, Janet shared her frustration upon this issue with the group members: *“Why do they have to guide us how to interpret the series according to what they want? Do they think that we have no brain to think for ourselves and need their guidance all the time?”*

Conclusion: Rethinking Television Series and Young Female Audiences

This paper is audience ethnography of how research participants, as television drama series viewers and fans, actively engaged with and talked about the series’ texts that are offered to them. According to Van Fleet (1998), media consumption is often misunderstood as meaning that the public is molded by ideas imposed on it; that is, that “assimilating” necessarily means ‘becoming similar to’ what one absorbs, rather than ‘making something similar’ to what one is, making it one’s own, appropriating it or re-appropriating it (de Certeau, 1988). The results show that research participants, as television drama series audiences, do not necessarily consume what the series producers want and that the received text can be quite different from that of the original text. It is therefore important to see the ways in which consumption is a productive and transformative process, intimately tied to the appropriation and conversion of meanings. Most importantly, the results demonstrate that even though the television series tried to address the conventional model of ‘well-behaved women’ (*kunlasatree*), such an address is received as multiple and full of contradictions as the lives and self-identifications of each schoolgirl who watch them. In other words, the consumption of television drama series often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and agency (Van Fleet, 1998).

In sum, to understand young female audiences’ interactions with the television drama series and numerous ways in which their sexual selves are constituted and expressed through their viewing practices and interpretations, the results show the interplay between particular series’ texts and how these texts are re-appropriated and made meaningful by the young female audiences in their everyday lives.

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