THE SILENT DESIRE: ISLAM, WOMEN’S SEXUALITY
AND THE POLITICS OF PATRIARCHY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how Islam influences discourses of sexuality in Indonesia, and in particular how Islamic teachings influence Muslim married women’s perceptions and behaviour in their sexual relationships with their husbands. There is very little research into married women’s sexuality in Indonesia. The existing research on women’s sexuality argues that the state gender ideology and cultural systems influence the construction of women’s sexuality. In this thesis, I argue that Islam also plays a significant role in shaping women’s sexuality in Indonesia.

Fieldwork was conducted in Bandung, West Java. In-depth interviews, using a feminist ethnographic approach, were used to gather data exploring women’s expectations, desires and practices in marital sexual relationships. This sensitive research was enabled by my positionality as an insider researcher, and the use of reflexivity. To analyse Islamic texts on sexuality I employed an Islamic feminist hermeneutical approach.

My thesis shows that women perceive marriage as a social, cultural and religious obligation they need to fulfil. However, women realise that finding an ideal marriage partner is complicated. Some have the opportunity for a long courtship while others barely knew their partner prior to marriage. Many women are shy and fearful of their first sexual experience. In addition, the lack of knowledge about sexuality and the taboos surrounding talk about sexuality make women vulnerable in their marital sexual relationships. Consequently, women have inadequate opportunity to express and explore their sexual desires in marriage.

This thesis finds that there is a strong tendency for women to consider a sexual relationship in marriage as their duty and their husband’s right. In this situation it was difficult for most women to refuse sex. Religious and cultural discourses justify and support this view and consider refusal a sin (dosa) or taboo (pamali). Both discourses emphasise obedience towards husbands in
marriage. My data suggest that religious teachings about sexuality are very influential and these teachings are perceived as guidance for the marital sexual relationship. Women obtained religious knowledge from various sources, such as marriage guidance manuals, the *kitab* (classical Islamic textbooks) and *pengajian* (religious gatherings), and these play a significant role in directing their perceptions of, and behaviour in, their everyday marital relationships. In fact, Islamic teachings both support and proscribe women’s expression of sexual desire in marriage. Unfortunately, the supportive teachings were not well known among women, compared to proscriptive teachings. The latter, male-dominated sources justify and sustain the normative gender ideology that teaches that in heteronormative relationships males are active and superior and females passive and inferior. A hermeneutical approach to analysing Islamic teachings on sexuality finds its significance in understanding the historical and contextual background of such texts.

This research also shows that it is possible for some women to exercise sexual agency through various strategies. This agency enables them to excuse themselves from sexual engagement, to negotiate their sexual preferences and to seek pleasurable sexual relations in marriage. This thesis provides better understanding of women’s sexuality, their sexual practices, and recognition of their sexual rights.
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<tr>
<td>adat</td>
<td>tradition, customary law</td>
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<tr>
<td>ahl al-kitab</td>
<td>people of the Book, usually refers to Jews and Christians</td>
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<tr>
<td>al-Salaf</td>
<td>devout ancestor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>asbab al-nuzul</td>
<td>occasion of revelation of a particular Qur’anic text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘awra (aurat Ind.)</td>
<td>the body parts that should be covered from public sight under Islamic law.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘azl</td>
<td>coitus interruptus</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dalil</td>
<td>proof text</td>
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<tr>
<td>dosa</td>
<td>sin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>fatwa</td>
<td>religious ruling</td>
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<td>fiqh</td>
<td>Islamic jurisprudence</td>
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<tr>
<td>fitnah</td>
<td>originally means trial. It is usually attributed to women as a source of disturbance of faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>hirabah</td>
<td>social disorder</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ibadah</td>
<td>part of worshiping God</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘iddah</td>
<td>waiting period for both parties after the dissolution of marriage</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ijab kabul</td>
<td>offer and acceptance in marriage contract</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Janda</td>
<td>divorcee and widow</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jodoh</td>
<td>soul-mate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kitab kuning</td>
<td>classical Islamic book that printed in yellow paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>KUA</td>
<td>(Kantor Urusan Agama, Office of Religious Affairs)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kyai (ajengan Sund.)</td>
<td>leader of Islamic boarding school</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>madzhab</td>
<td>Islamic school of law</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>mahr (mas kawin Ind.)</td>
<td>bride price</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>mahram</td>
<td>several types of persons one is forbidden to marry</td>
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<tr>
<td>majlis ta’lim</td>
<td>women religious study gathering</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>malam pertama</td>
<td>first night after the wedding for the couple</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>malu</td>
<td>shy, shame</td>
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mandi wajib: an obligatory bath. In Islam a person is obliged to perform cleanliness (thahara) at certain conditions such as wet dream (male), menstruation (female), intercourse (male and female), bleeding after birth (female). Bathing symbolises cleanliness and readiness to perform religious rites like praying, fasting and reciting the Qur’an.

mu’amalat: social affairs
muballigh (female. muballighah): Islamic preacher
mukaddimah: originally means introduction. When it is associated with intercourse means foreplay
mushala: praying hall
nafaza (nafkah Ind.): maintenance
nafsu: lust
nikah siri: secret and usually unregistered marriage
nushuz: marital disharmony
pacaran: courtship
pahala: afterlife reward
pamali: taboo in Sundanese cultural context
pengajian (pangaosan Sund.): religious study gathering
penghulu: marriage registrar
pesantren: Islamic boarding school
qawwam: men’s authority
salafiyyah: traditionalism
sakinah, mawaddah wa rahmah: marriage full of harmony, love and tenderness
santri: student of Islamic boarding school
shalat: the performance of ritual prayer in Islam
shari’a: Islamic law
shighat ta’lik talak: Conditions that enable both parties to report for divorce include: absence of maintenance from the husband, desertion and maltreatment.
surah: chapter in the Qur’an
SUSCATIN: (Kursus Calon Pengantin, Pre-marital Information Session)
ta’at: obedience
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<th>Term</th>
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<td>tarekat</td>
<td>‘road’ or ‘method’ in Islamic mysticism (Sufi order)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tawhid</td>
<td>the concept of Islamic monotheism (oneness of God)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thalaq (cerai Ind.)</td>
<td>divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ulama</td>
<td>Islamic scholars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ummah</td>
<td>Muslim community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undak-unduk basa</td>
<td>Sundanese speech levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ushul fiqh</td>
<td>principles of Islamic jurisprudence</td>
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<tr>
<td>ustadz</td>
<td>religious teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>wali</td>
<td>guardian</td>
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<td>zina</td>
<td>illicit sexual activity</td>
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Chapter One
Introduction

There is no simple and straightforward way to liberate women and sexuality from religion, nor is it straightforwardly obvious that religion cannot play a role in this liberation. (Alcoff & Caputo, 2011, p. 9)

Background of the Study

Feminism and sexuality are two topics that are often viewed as controversial and sensitive in the study of Islam. Feminism is controversial both, in theory and application in Islam, and sexuality is strictly regulated and controlled in many Muslim societies. In Indonesian society, the discussion of sexuality is seen as not only sensitive (related to personal and private practice) and dangerous (related to moral anxiety), but also curious (tempting and seductive). As sexuality in Indonesia is taboo, researching sexuality in this country is a significant challenge. This thesis attempts to entwine sexuality, feminism and religion in exploring women’s sexuality in this society.

This study examines the relationship between Islamic teachings on sexuality and Muslim married women’s perceptions of these teachings. It also examines the relationship between these perceptions and women’s stated behaviour in their marital sexual relationships. I argue that religious teachings significantly influence Muslim married women’s perceptions and behaviours in their marital relationships with their husbands. Unfortunately, the teachings that have most influence are those that suggest sex in marriage is women’s duty instead of their right. In fact, there are other Islamic teachings that suggest that marital sexual relationships be based on mutual sharing and fulfillment. However, the latter are less known than the former. It is important to recall those primary Islamic texts that teach that ideal marital sexual relationships evoke the sexual rights of women in marriage. Therefore, this thesis also aims to analyse the political interest behind the construction and dissemination of Islamic texts regarding
marriage and sexuality in Indonesia.

The study of women has been a prominent topic in Islamic religious discourse since the late 19th century. Many scholars have studied Islamic texts in search of teachings about various aspects of women’s position in Islam, such as women’s creation, women’s inheritance, polygyny, marriage and divorce, many of which are believed to be the basis of women’s oppression. However, the study of women’s sexuality has received little attention. Of the limited work that is available, the foremost resources on Islam and sexuality are: Musallam (1983), Sabbah (1984), Bouhdiba (1985), Hassan (1990) and Ali (2006). They provide theoretical perspectives derived from the Qur’an, Hadith (the Prophet’s sayings) and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence).

The study of the role of Islam in shaping sexuality is still concentrated in Middle Eastern societies and has been addressed by Mernissi (1987), Haeri (1989), Ilkkaracan (2000, 2002) and Dialmy (2010). Ilkkaracan notes that women’s sexual subjugation in Egypt and Maghreb is not the result of Islamic precepts on sexuality as such, but is a mixture of political, economic, and social inequality that has developed across the ages (2002). In those countries, Islamic teaching is frequently used to benefit male sexuality and repress female sexuality.

In Indonesia, which is not an Islamic state but has a Muslim majority, Islamic texts have been used to justify male dominance over females in issues such as polygyny and marital violence. However, unlike in Egypt or Iran, where some Muslim women struggle against the clergy, the hijab (Islamic veil), and gender segregation (Moghadam, 2002; Ahmadi, 2006), Indonesian Muslim women are typically more relaxed on issues of veiling and gender segregation.

When Islam spread through what is now Indonesia, it adapted to diverse ethnic, cultural and social realities. The process of Islamisation in Indonesia took place by enculturation between Islamic teachings and local customs. Thus, religious beliefs and practices are shaped by the cultural context and vice versa. The intersection between cultural norms and religious teachings to a certain extent
also “influenced the conceptualization of gender differences” (Robinson, 2009, p. 12).

The majority of Indonesian Muslims can be categorised as moderate, and many belong to mainstream organisations such as NU (Nahdatul Ulama) and Muhammadiyah (Azra & Hudson, 2008; Sukma & Joewono, 2007). These two mainstream organisations support modernity, democracy, human rights, and gender equality. There are also small groups of radical Muslim organisations such as the FPI (Islamic Defenders Front), Hizbut Tahrir (The Party of Liberation) and Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (Mujahidin Council of Indonesia) but they have limited influence in Indonesia as a whole (Azra & Hudson, 2008; Muhtadi, 2009).

During the New Order regime (1968-1998), the gender ideology promoted women’s primary roles as wife and mother (Robinson, 2009; Suryakusuma, 1996). In the post-1998 reform era, there was greater opportunity to change gender ideology with significant contributions such as a female president, the establishment of a 30 percent gender quota for all political parties’ candidates, and the enactment of a law against domestic violence in 2004 (UU PKDRT No. 23/2004). The Reform era also opened up the discussion of sexuality which can now be seen in Indonesian magazines, newspapers, radio, and television (Holzner & Oetomo, 2004; Munti, 2005; Handajani, 2005). However, there are still double standards in regards to sexuality, as can be seen in the Pornography Law of 2008 and local regulations requiring school girls and female civil servants to wear the jilbab (Islamic headscarf) (Noerdin, 2002; Wichelen, 2010). The contemporary Islamic revival is socially conservative, giving religious authority to a normative1 gender ideology that locates women in the home and as responsible for the household.

While Islam plays a significant role in shaping sexuality, studies of this role, in particular in shaping women’s sexuality, are rare. Several scholars have undertaken research on other aspects of sexuality in Indonesia. Munir (2002) has

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1 In this thesis, ‘normative’ means based on dominant and accepted norms in Indonesian society.

Certain Islamic teachings on sexuality that are circulated in Indonesia are more dominant than other teachings. For example, the Hadith concerning the obligation of women to satisfy men’s sexual needs in marriage is better known than the Hadith on the duty of men to fulfill women’s sexual needs, and even takes precedence over the Qur’anic verse that discusses the mutual satisfaction of the couple. For example, the Hadith compiled in Shahih Bukhari (1971, p. 93) narrated by Abu Huraira includes the following passage: The Prophet said, "If a man invites his wife to sleep with him and she refuses to come to him, then the angels send their curses on her till morning". This passage is more popular than the Qur’anic verse on the mutual relationship of wife and husband that states: “Permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garment and ye are their garments” (Q. 2: 187). This study will also seek to uncover why some teachings are favoured over others, and also to determine the political interests of the Muslim authorities in the dissemination of Islamic teachings on sexuality in Indonesia. In this context, political interest is defined as the power relations involved in religious knowledge production (Foucault, 1990): how knowledge and ideas are distributed in society, by whom and for what
purpose. In this thesis, I will explore the power strategies that operate in this knowledge production and the dissemination of religious discourse on sexuality.

**Research Questions**

The central research question that my thesis will answer is: how do Islamic teachings on sexuality affect the perceptions and behaviour of Muslim married women in Indonesia in their sexual relationships with their husbands? Flowing from this, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Muslim women on marriage and marital sexual relationships?
2. What are women’s experiences of marital and sexual relationships?
3. Do Islamic teachings on marriage and sexuality influence women’s perception of, and behaviour in, their marital and sexual relationships? In what ways?
4. What Islamic teachings do Muslim married women identify as regulating sexuality? And how do they perceive and understand these Islamic teachings on sexuality?
5. What are the political interests of Muslim authorities that influence the dissemination of Islamic teachings on sexuality in Indonesia?

**Significance of the Research**

Research on sexuality is still limited in Indonesia, especially on heterosexual relationships. This study will make a contribution to the body of knowledge on the religious construction of female sexuality in Indonesia, with a particular emphasis on married women’s sexuality. It will also contribute new knowledge on women’s understanding of their sexuality and their sexual practice. Hull (1982, p. 118) pointed out that “[t]here is very little research [in Indonesia] on the sexual life of married couples”. Besides, as Parker (2008, p. 19) mentions, there appears to be more research on “alternative sexualities” than there is on “hegemonic heterosexuality”. This study will contribute to the study of the
sexual life of the married couple, a research area that has attracted little attention from scholars of contemporary Indonesia. More broadly, this study will enhance our understanding of gender relations in Indonesia, and in particular of the religious dimensions of gender ideology and the gender system in Indonesia.

This study will also contribute to an understanding of the role of Islam in shaping Indonesian culture, and *vice versa*, the role of Indonesian culture in shaping the practice of Islam. This has been overlooked in previous studies, especially relating to gender and sexuality (Robinson, 2001). Hefner (1997) and Wichelen (2010) note that most studies that focus on Islam are conducted in the Middle East. The Indonesian cultural context makes a difference: for example, it is widely acknowledged that Muslim women in Indonesian society are much more active in public life than Muslim women in most Middle Eastern societies. The reverse is also true: Islam in Indonesia has played an important role in shaping not only the culture but also the nation, and this role has been neglected as a topic of scholarly enquiry.

In developing countries, according to Accad (2000), research on sexuality is overlooked compared to other issues such as hunger, poverty and unemployment. In the Indonesian context, where the economic situation is quite stable, I find it significant to address how women experience everyday life in relation to their marital sexuality. The majority of women considered marital sexual relations their duty rather than their right. I argue that they arrived at this understanding through influence from social, legal and religious ‘scripts’ (Simon & Gagnon, 1984) during the socialisation process. In this thesis, I will emphasise the religious teachings that significantly influence the perceptions and behaviour of Muslim married women in their marital and sexual relationships with their husbands.

The Islamic resurgence in contemporary Indonesia has increased both piety and the public expression of piety among Indonesian Muslims. Many Muslims are motivated by religious teachings in many aspects of life. However, as Hefner
notes (2010, p. 1033), much of the scholarly analysis of this resurgence is concentrated on the macro-level (the state, global capitalism and secular modernity) and less on the micro- and meso-levels of the “self, family and everyday life.” Therefore, it is important to observe this new phenomenon in women’s daily interactions with their husbands.

**Positionality and Reflexivity of the Researcher/Participant in Sexual Research**

Turning in upon ourselves as researchers makes us look subjectively and reflexively at how we are positioned. Turning in upon ourselves prevents us from removing our selv(es) from our research process, from our connections with our informants, or from our written translation of data to text. (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 119)

This thesis is more than my academic journey. It encompasses my identity and my social life as a Sundanese, an Indonesian and a Muslim woman. This thesis not only represents the research participants but in some part also represents me. That is why I positioned myself in this research both as researcher and participant, like Roald (2004) in researching Muslim women in Europe. My research is about the sexuality of Muslim married women in West Java, Indonesia and I am a Muslim married woman from West Java.

Unlike other topics which are commonly and openly discussed, such as how to raise children or how to manage daily expenses, sexual identity in relation to behaviour or practice is something that is not openly discussed in the family or in public in Indonesia. Although, sometimes, sexual themes are used for making jokes, one’s sexual life is still considered private. Discussing it with other people may cause shame or hesitation. With this in mind, I commenced my fieldwork feeling excited and wondering how it would be, as this was my first experience of field research. At the same time, I felt nervous, I was anxious about whether there would be anyone willing to participate in the study. Would they cooperate and would they share their stories?
Anticipating the challenge in this fieldwork, I equipped myself with strategies derived from my reading of feminist ethnography. Many feminists have adopted ethnography as an “appropriate” way to approach feminist research because it emphasises the interaction between researcher and researched and the reciprocity between them (Stacey, 1988, Jackson, 1989; Chiseri-Strater, 1996). I was inspired by the feminist idea of this relationship and how it can be used to understand the experience of others with regard to mutuality, and reduced hierarchy and exploitation (Oakley, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1983). Reflexivity is also considered a suitable strategy to deal with “the complexity of fieldwork relations” (Dales, 2007).

Reflexivity in qualitative research locates the self in the process of collecting data and is conscious of the politics of representation (Macbeth, 2001; Pillow, 2003). When being reflexive, the researcher self-consciously interacts with the “research world” – the self, the other, the context and the text – to construct mutual recognition of experiences, mutual understanding of the experiences, and mutual interpretations and representations of the research process (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982; Wasserfall, 1993; Chiseri-Strater, 1996).

Chiseri-Strater (1996, p. 115) has asserted that “researchers are positioned by age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical-personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition”. The positions represented by the researcher influence the research process and are an integral part of the data (Altorki & El-Solh, 1988).

In this research, I consider myself an insider researcher doing research in my own culture (Okely, 1996). As a researcher, I share personal and emotional experiences with the participants of my study (Narayan, 1989). Since the 1960s, when researching one’s own cultures became popular, it has been increasingly argued that relevance, authenticity and involvement in the production of knowledge is important. There are also challenges with respect to objectivity and pattern differentiation (Altorki & El-Solh, 1988).
There are certain privileges that come with being an insider researcher, such as familiarity with the cultural and social backgrounds of the participants, language assurance and accessibility (Narayan, 1993; Okely, 1996; Dyck, 2000). When undertaking my fieldwork I felt familiar with the site and knew where to go. Positioning oneself as an insider may not be better, however, than being an outsider – it depends on the context. As Dales (2007) suggests, the insider/outsider position during fieldwork should be flexible in practice. During my fieldwork, most of the time, I enjoyed the privilege of shared gender, which enabled me to get close to women in relationships that were like those between friends, or that between mother and daughter. In this way I shared conversations about their life stories as a fellow Muslim married woman.

As researcher, there were many times when I was asked to disclose personal information to the female participants. In the interviews it was not always me who asked the questions: they asked questions as well, mostly about my personal identity or marital experiences; they even wanted to know what I would do in their position. Some women wanted to know my opinion of certain Qur’anic verses and Hadith. I often referred them to books or other reading materials.

Exercising self-reflexivity during my fieldwork was unavoidable for me. During the interviews, which were conversational, personal information was exchanged. Through the reciprocity of sharing personal information and by sharing our identities and experiences, we built mutual understanding and empathy. The resulting closeness and trust that developed further opened up the interaction.

As gender significantly influences the analysis and interpretation of data, my understanding of those women’s stories is also shaped by my own personal experience, my empathy for the women’s experiences and my feminism. Exercising reflexivity also enabled me to respect whatever opinions the women had.

This ethnographic research aims to understand women’s perceptions and understanding of marital sexual relations and how cultural and religious
teachings influence their perceptions and guide their practice in marriage. In understanding women’s experiences, employing feminist ethnography and self-reflexivity has enabled me to engage in very productive fieldwork. I enjoyed the fieldwork. It has enriched and deepened not only my understanding of my own society (especially women’s everyday lives) but more importantly, it has increased my consciousness of being an active member of the community. Jackson once reminded us: “Our understanding of others can only proceed from within our own experience, and this experience involves our personalities and histories as much as our field research” (1989, p. 17).

The Study Setting

This study is set in West Java (Fig. 1). This region of Indonesia is experiencing rapid population growth as a result of increased employment and education opportunities in the region. After Independence, large numbers of people moved from rural areas to the cities in West Java to find employment (Hugo, 1981). Hundreds of factories were built in these areas and the Tangerang, Bekasi, and Sukabumi areas have increased to such an extent that they are now seen as an expansion of the industrial districts of Jakarta (Fig. 2). The factories in West Java employ both local and migrant workers, and since 1961, increasing numbers of these workers are females who have moved from the agricultural sector (Sayogyo & Wahyuni, 1994). Thus the industrial development of West Java has had a significant impact on the status of women and gender relations in the family.
West Java is inhabited by more than 43 million people (Badan Pusat Statistic Jawa Barat, 2011). West Javanese people are usually called urang sunda (Sundanese) as this is the dominant ethnic group in this region (Suryadinata, Arifin, & Ananta, 2003). The Sundanese have a different language, culture and history to the Javanese in central and eastern Java. West Javanese people speak Sundanese. Traditionally, Sundanese did not distinguish between speech levels (undak-usuk basa). However, with the influence of Javanese feudalism and Dutch colonialism, speech levels which differentiate...
between refined language (basa lemes) and coarse language (basa kasar) became part of Sundanese society.

Like the Javanese, the Sundanese family system is bilateral. This means that both mother’s and father’s lines are acknowledged equally. However, the household head of the family is male, whether that be the husband or the father. This is in accordance with the state gender ideology (Sariyun, 2006). Historically, women have a high status and are respected in Sundanese society represented by the role of Sunan Ambu as the highest female deity in the celestial world (kayangan) and Nyi Pohaci Sangiang Sri as the agrarian goddess who provides rice paddies (Tohari, 2013). Scholars believe that following the occupation of Sunda by the Javanese kingdom of Mataram in 1575, there was a shift in Sundanese culture from an egalitarian society to a feudal (Adimihardja, 1980; Ekadjati, 1995; Kahmad, 2006).

There have been a number of studies of women in West Java. Researchers have focused on women labouring in factories (Matter, 1985; Hancock, 2001; Warouw, 2004, 2008), home industrial employment (Grijns, 1987; Grijns, Smith, Van Velzen, Machfud, & Sajogyo, 1994; Silvey, 2004), maternal and infant mortality (Utomo, 1996; Iskandar, Utomo, Hull, Dharmaputra, & Azwar, 1996; Shefner-Rogers, 2004), family planning (Newland, 2001), domestic violence (Binahayati, 2011), the implementation of Islamic sharia and its effect on women’s wellbeing (Noerdin 2002; Turmudi, 2004; Suhadi, 2004), Sundanese Islam and the role of ulama (Islamic scholars) and tarekat (Sufi order) (Horikoshi, 1976; Newland, 2000; Millie, 2008). Few studies, however, have examined gender relations, especially in marriage and sexuality, in this region.

This study aims to expand understanding of gender issues in the West Java region. The study site is in the eastern part of the city of Bandung. The site is serviced by an interprovincial main road connecting central and eastern Java. The road is very busy and often congested with traffic. The east Bandung population is concentrated along this main road, and the population density is high. Rental
properties and housing complexes are common in this area, needed to meet the high housing demand of this population, and the cost of accommodation ranges from moderate to very high. There are also many factories and four higher education institutions (state owned and private; secular and Islamic) along the main road.

In east Bandung the population is predominantly Sundanese who speak Sundanese. However, the community is heterogeneous and there are many migrants from various districts in West Java and Central Java who come to Bandung to find jobs in the factories and to study. Their occupations vary, and include factory labourers, petty traders, construction workers, academics and government officials. As the locals compete with migrants for jobs and the migrants are often more educated and wealthier than the local population, this can cause tension.

The field research for this study was conducted from May 2012 to July 2012 in the eastern part of Bandung. The primary participants of the research are Muslim married women. A total of 74 participants were recruited, and included Muslim married women, Islamic community leaders, marriage registrars and an NGO director.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study will apply a feminist hermeneutical approach to the study of religion. In particular, this study will operate within the framework of Islamic feminism and hermeneutics. The use of the phrase ‘Islamic feminism’ is undoubtedly controversial in the Islamic context. There are disagreements not only about the concept but also about its applicability: the word ‘feminism’ is usually associated with Western ideology. In Indonesia, many Indonesians consider this term a ‘non-indigenous’ concept and irrelevant to Indonesian values (Sadli, 2002). In many other Muslim countries, people attempting to import feminist ideals have been accused of ‘betraying’ local cultural authenticity (Kandiyoti, 1991).
has been heated discussion of this topic in Iran (Moghadam, 2002; Ahmadi, 2006) and Egypt (Badran, 1989, 1995; Karam, 1998). There has also been heated discussion of the differences between secular feminism and Islamic feminism (Badran, 2005). Several Muslim scholars, like Moghissi (1999) and Afkhami (Moghadam, 2002), have criticised the phrase ‘Islamic feminism’ as they believe feminism is incompatible with Islam. Other Muslim scholars suggest that in the Islamic context great care should be taken in using this term. Tohidi (2007) advises use of the term ‘Muslim feminist’ rather than ‘Islamic feminist’: the former term seems to be less troubling as it refers to personal identity (‘a Muslim who is feminist’) rather than the religion as a whole. The word Islam in ‘Islamic feminism’ is also problematic: which Islam is represented in this phrase?

Nevertheless, Islamic feminism is used in this study and Muslim society should become familiar with this term. Badran (2002a) argues that although the term ‘feminism’ originated in the West it is not Western. She states that “feminisms are produced in particular places and are articulated in local terms” (Badran, 2002a, p.1). Islamic feminism in this study follows Badran’s definition:

a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm, … [it] derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur’an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence (2002a, p.1).

This thesis will employ a hermeneutical approach to reading Islamic texts, in particular a feminist hermeneutical approach offered by Islamic scholars, especially in Chapter Nine. Islamic feminist hermeneutical approach proposes that the Qur’an is compatible with modernity and supports gender equality. Among those who apply the hermeneutic model to their work in analysing Islamic texts are Aziza al-Hibri (1982), Riffat Hassan (1994), Amina Wadud (1999) and Asma Barlas (2002). Their hermeneutical approach involves the following: first, linguistic and grammatical analyses of the Qur’anic text; second, application of the concept of the unity of the Qur’an, suggesting that the verses in the Qur’an are related to each other and should not be read separately; third, application of moral and ethical criteria (Hassan, 1994; Wadud, 1999). Their main concerns are
rereading and reinterpreting the Qur’an, and emphasising not only its textual meaning but also its socio-historical context. They challenge the patriarchal interpretation of the Qur’an and reinterpret it within an egalitarian and anti-patriarchal epistemology (Barlas, 2002, 2006; al-Hibri, 1982).

In Indonesia, the discourse of the hermeneutic approach to the Qur’an has attracted favorable attention from modern scholars like Nurcholis Madjid (1996; Johns & Saeed, 2004), Hidayat (1996), Amal & Panggabean (2005), and several Islamic feminist like Marcoes-Natsir (Sciortino, Marcoes-Natsir, & Mas‘udi, 1996) and Mulia (2005). However, I acknowledge that few Muslims in Indonesia accept this hermeneutical approach to the Qur’an. There are many who reject it, particularly conservative and radical Islamic writers such as Husaini (2008) and Al-Anshari (2008). They argue that hermeneutics originated from the West and is used in Biblical interpretation, and is therefore not suitable for the Qur’an. They say that as the words in the Qur’an are divine and sacred, applying this approach could be sacrilegious. They attack scholars who apply this method, not only in Indonesia but elsewhere, and accuse scholars like Abu Zayd, Rahman and Arkoun of blasphemy. Nevertheless, the hermeneutical approach offers dynamic and active interaction between text and its context, to derive the general principles of the text to be recontextualised in various social contexts (Wadud, 1999; Abu Zayd, 2010).

**Thesis Structure**

This thesis contains ten interrelated chapters. The chapters address women’s life histories through their experiences of marriage and sexual relationships.

**Chapter Two**

Chapter Two provides a literature review of ethnographic research on marriage and sexuality in the Indonesian context and from Islamic perspectives. Much of the available research on the Islamic influence on sexuality has been undertaken in Middle Eastern countries. To my knowledge, this thesis is one of the few
studies focusing on marital sexual relations that include religion in the Indonesian context.

**Chapter Three**

This chapter details the methodology employed for this research, namely qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with 72 participants and textual analysis. I am benefitting from employing self-reflexivity where I am positioned in this research both as researcher and as participant. I was influenced by feminist ethnography in doing my fieldwork where I managed to build close relationship with the participants. For textual analysis, I employ a feminist hermeneutical approach to analyse Islamic texts related to marriage and sexuality that were mentioned by participants. Most of the analysis occurs in Chapter Nine. This approach provides critical understanding of Islamic texts that enable other voices to contribute knowledge production especially from women’s point of view.

**Chapter Four**

In Chapter Four I present the results of my research in the field, exploring women’s perceptions and expectations of marriage and sexual relations. This chapter shows that women’s perceptions of marriage and sexual relations are deeply influenced by Indonesian social, cultural, and religious norms. Those norms promote a normative gender ideology of women’s behaviour in marriage, in which sexual relations are expected of women as dutiful wives and good mothers. Many of the women who participated in this study have internalised these prescribed norms. These norms were learned through socialisation, social interaction and experience, and acquired by women through various sources such as marriage books and sex manuals, religious study gatherings, and peer conversations.
Chapter Five

In Chapter Five I discuss women’s experience preparing for marriage, including their mate preference, engagement and the marriage proposal. I also describe the role of the KUA (Office of Religious Affairs) and its program of pre-marital information sessions (SUSCATIN). If properly established, this program could play a significant role in increasing women’s access to information in this area. In this chapter, I argue that the social, cultural and religious pressure on women to marry influences their decision to get married and many give up seeking their ideal marriage partner and accept the first available candidate who proposes. This chapter also shows that there are various ways for women to find a mate, from arranged marriage to self-choice involving a romantic relationship.

Chapter Six

This chapter analyses the adjustment process that many of the female participants in this study described experiencing in the first years of marriage. I argue that there are five areas of differences between marriage partners that may need negotiation, namely: family origin and upbringing; personal character; ethnic background; age; and class differences. This chapter also covers household arrangements and the division of labour between the spouses, and its effect on marital conflict. I argue that women are still responsible for most domestic labour, even though many also contribute significantly to the family income. Equally important was that several women managed to discuss sharing housework with their husbands.

Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven contains the main argument of the thesis. It elaborates women’s experiences of marital sexual relations with their husbands. In this chapter, I argue that the lack of knowledge concerning sexual relations in marriage affects women’s initiation into sex on the ‘first night’ (malam pertama), usually the wedding night. Fear and shyness are the most common feelings experienced by women on this occasion. The data presented in this chapter shaped my main
argument: that many women perceive sex in marriage as their duty and their husband’s right. Thus, many women try to serve their husband’s sexual demands even on occasions when they do not want sex. Some of the women even have to deal with their husband’s sexual violence. I also argue that religious teachings have been influential in directing women’s marital sexual relationships.

Chapter Eight

This chapter presents the voices of a few women participants in this study who occasionally negotiate with their husband about their preferences during sex. These women are able to express their desires in many aspects of sex, e.g. the initiation of sex, sexual communication, sexual stimulation, positions adopted and the frequency of sex. This chapter also presents women’s experiences of sex and reproduction. Where women mobilise strategies to experience pleasurable sex, there is evidence of the exercise of agency. The strategies also enable women to avoid sex, that is, drawing on other Islamic texts enabling them to not-act.

Chapter Nine

This chapter focuses on how Islamic teachings affect women’s perceptions and behaviours in their marital sexual relations. Further, this chapter delves into how women encounter texts that encourage women to be obedient toward the husband in sexual relations and that privilege men’s desire. Two sites were noted by my female participants as having authority in disseminating religious teaching, namely: pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) and majlis ta’lim (religious study gatherings). I argue that there are two sides of teachings related to marital sexual relations in Islam: on one side, the teachings that support women’s position, and the other side, the teachings that repress women’s position. Hitherto, most women have been made familiar with the teachings prescribing sex in marriage as their duty. In this chapter, I provide alternative texts and interpretation of those texts to counter the existing interpretation. I also argue that pesantren and majlis ta’lim have a significant role in disseminating normative
gender prescriptions of marital sexual relations, privileging men through their reading and preaching activities.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

By way of conclusion, this chapter synthesises earlier chapters. In the first part, I restate the main research questions and findings of this project. My argument is supported by data provided in the consecutive and interrelated chapters I presented in this thesis. The general argument that I make is that despite the changing patterns in economic and social aspects of marriage in Indonesia, marital sexual relations still emphasise a normative gender ideology that suggests that sex in marriage is the wife’s duty and the husband’s right. Although I acknowledge the diversity of practices across Indonesia, I argue that this norm is widely accepted.
Chapter Two

Literature Review on Marriage and Sexuality: The Indonesian Context and Islamic Perspectives

Research on gender issues in contemporary Indonesia has increased significantly in recent years. A large and growing body of literature has emerged addressing gender relations in Indonesia (Robinson, 2001; Ford & Parker, 2008). The Reform era—since 1998—has offered good opportunities for various discussions in Indonesia that include gender equality. Nevertheless, other challenges have also emerged related to fundamentalist movements opposing gender equality. Gender relations are an important element in the study of women in Indonesian society, and play a key role in marriage and sexuality where responsibilities are divided according to gender roles. Sexuality is a site from which women are mainly excluded. Women’s sexuality (in or outside of marriage) is highly controlled by men, society and the state (Matter, 1985; Berninghausen & Kerstan, 1992; Wolf, 1992).

This chapter reviews the existing literatures addressing marriage and sexuality in the Indonesian context and from Islamic perspectives. This chapter is divided into two sections: the first section explores ethnographic research on marriage and sexuality in the Indonesian context; and the second the academic literature on marriage and sexuality in Islam. These reviews are important because they show how gender plays a significant role in marriage and sexuality in Indonesia, as well as in Islam. This chapter aims to clearly map the research already conducted by other scholars related to marriage and sexuality, to position my own research within it and to identify how my research contributes to existing knowledge. This thesis addresses gender relations in marriage with specific attention to married women’s experiences of their sexual relations, particularly in West Java, which is comparatively neglected in the literature.
The Indonesian Context

*Ethnographic Research on Marriage: Gender Contested*

Much of the ethnographic research related to marriage has been concentrated in Java (Geertz, 1961; Jay, 1969; Koentjaraningrat, 1985; Berninghausen & Kerstan, 1992; Wolf, 1992; Sullivan, 1994; Brenner, 1998). While other research has been done in Sulawesi (Blackburn, 2001; Idrus, 2003) and Lombok (Platt, 2010; Bennett, Andajani-Sutjahjo, & Idrus, 2011), very little has been conducted in West Java. Some of these works have supported the notion that women have high status and authority in the family (e.g. H. Geertz, 1961; Jay, 1969; Hull, 1982; Blackwood, 1995b). Others challenge this idea by asserting that woman still experience subordination in every aspect of their lives, especially within family life (Wolf, 1992; Sullivan, 1994; Brenner, 1998).

Marriage in Indonesia is almost universal and represents an important phase of life. Marriage establishes a new household and marks the achievement of adult economic and social status. It is the only institution where man and woman can legally engage in sexual relations. The expectation to get married is even greater for women than for men. This is because women are expected to guard their sexual purity and sanctity before being married, with virginity considered important for women but not men.

Marriage also signifies the recognition of women gendered role in society and in the nation. In Indonesia, the gender role attached to women as promoted by the state during the New Order regime was that women’s responsibility was to stay at home and be good wives and mothers, managing the household and taking care of the children. Men’s duty was in the public sphere as provider and protector of the family (Blackwood, 1995b; Suryakusuma, 1996; Robinson, 2009). Although the regime has long ended, its gender ideology remains intact. The state gender ideology influences the gender relations of everyday life and has become a stereotype that governs the allocation of roles between males and females in Indonesian society. Robinson (2009) argues that this state gender
ideology has failed to consider diverse gender practices throughout Indonesia. The government has reduced the roles of men and women to the public and private spheres respectively.

Hildred Geertz’s work (1961) showed that women in Javanese society have a relatively strong position. Javanese women are employed in various occupations in and around the community. Women also control the household economy and make major decisions for the family concerning household expenses, children and family rituals (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). By contrast, Sullivan (1994) argued that women in Indonesia still experience subordination in the family. She compared the relationship between wife and husband to that of manager and master. The wife (manager) will spend all household expenses in accordance with the husband’s (master) will and instruction (Sullivan, 1994). Similarly, Brenner (1998) stated that even though women have authority over the household economy, because it is they who perform the business, this does not directly gain them high status. In the site where Brenner did her research, in Solo, dealing with money is associated with low status. High status, which can only be claimed by men, is acknowledged through self-control and spiritual potency (Brenner; 1998; see also Adamson, 2007 on men’s self-control).

Furthermore, married women are assessed for their ability to satisfy their husbands’ sexual needs and for their reproductive capacity. Marriage in Indonesia focuses on reproduction. The success of marriage is measured by the presence of children. Parker (2008, p. 23) showed that there is a close connection between marriage, sexuality and procreation as “the ideal and the norm” in Indonesia. Therefore, a childless marriage is viewed as pitiful. It is assumed to be the woman’s fault and may become an excuse for her husband to either divorce her or engage in polygynous marriage (Koentjaraningrat, 1985).4 Blaming the woman for an infertile marriage is a common phenomenon in Indonesia.

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4The absence of a child in a marriage is a justification for a man to marry polygynously. (See Indonesian Marriage Law 1974 chapter VIII: 41a).
In regard to polygynous marriage, previous and recent studies have reported that in Java the rate of polygynous marriage is low (Geertz, 1961; Koentjaraningrat, 1985; Nurmla, 2009; Wichelen; 2009). However, it is not uncommon for men to practise polygyny through *nikah siri* (secret marriage), in order to keep their reputation as respectable men, especially if they have not obtained their first wife’s permission. Thus, their polygynous marriage remains unknown. Having an affair (*s引擎kuh, nyeleng*) is also a common phenomenon in Indonesia. However, these phenomena do not weaken the expectation to marry. In many cases, couples who engage in *s引擎kuh* take the further step of either engaging in polygynous marriage (for the man) or terminating the former marriage and entering into a new married life.

Bilateral kinship is the most common kinship system in Indonesia. Bilateral kinship considers that the family lines of both husband and wife are important and have equal status. In a patrilineal system, the family lines are based on the male’s line, while in matrilineal societies, such as the Minangkabau, family lines are based on the female’s line.

Ethnographic research on marriage in different regions shows a strong connection between Islam and *adat* (custom, e.g. Platt, 2010; Idrus, 2003; Robinson, 2001; Blackwood, 1995b). However, the extent to which Islam has adapted to local custom and *vice versa* differs significantly across these regions. Platt’s (2010) research on marriage among Sasak people in Lombok showed that Sasak Islam is unique and differs from mainstream Islamic belief in other places in Indonesia. For example, in performing prayers (*shalat*), Sasak Muslims pray *Wetu Telu* (three times) while in other parts of Indonesia the conventional prayer five times a day is the norm. Platt reports that many marriages are organised in accordance with *adat* and Islam instead of state regulations. Consequently, many marriages are not registered (Platt, 2010). In these cases, Islam is continuously misused to justify men’s conduct, especially in issues such as polygyny and divorce. Similarly, Idrus (2003) found that Islam has influenced *adat* in marriage
patterns among the Bugis, but unlike in Sasak areas, Bugis marriages are regulated by the state.

The contribution of Islam to understandings of marriage and the regulation of marriage should be considered. In Indonesia, Islam’s close engagement with social practices and government and now politics has given it significant influence in policies and regulations. For example, the Indonesian Marriage Law of 1974 was influenced by Islamic texts in regard to man’s authority in the household and permission to practise polygyny. Chapter VI, article 31, point 3 of the Indonesian Marriage Law states that “(3) The husband is the head of the family, the wife is the mother of the family” and was influenced by Qur’anic verse 4: 34 which states that “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women.”

Nowadays, as a result of improved education, opportunities for women in the workforce have improved, with women working not only as labourers but also as professionals (Sen, 1998; Ford & Parker, 2008). Research by Sen (1998) advises that class and gender need to be considered in examining women’s participation in the workforce. Women’s participation in paid work has contributed to family incomes as examined by Berninghausen & Kerstan (1992), Wolf (1992) and Brenner (1995). Wolf’s study (1992) revealed that daughters, although not contributing significantly to family finances, could pay their own expenses, lessening the parent’s burden. Brenner (1998) provided another example of women’s engagement in the market and business which gives them economic strength and autonomy. However, as she further noted, this financial strength and autonomy does not at the same time give women high status (Brenner, 1998).

Women’s participation in the workplace enables them to contribute to household income; however, it does not mean they are excused from housework and child rearing or that men participate in housework. Women’s domestic work is considered ‘dirty’ (Munir, 2002, p. 196) and insignificant; this work is marginalised and undervalued (Ford & Parker, 2008). The New Order gender
ideology gives priority to the husband’s primary role as provider and the family head, and therefore the housewife’s role is considered subordinate.

**West Java**

There are few studies that focus on gender relations in West Javanese society. There are even fewer addressing women, marriage and sexuality. Several studies are concerned with women as industrial and non-industrial workers (Matter, 1985; Grijns, 1987; Grijns et al., 1994; Hancock, 2001; Warouw, 2004; Silvey, 2004), women’s health issues (Iskandar, Utomo, Hull, Dharmaputra, & Azwar, 1995; Utomo, 1996; Shefner-Rogers, 2004), the implementation of Islamic shari’ā and its effect on women’s wellbeing (Noerdin 2002; Turmudi, 2004; Suhadi, 2004), and the role of ulama and tarekat (Horikoshi, 1976; Newland, 2000; Millie & Syihabuddin, 2005; Millie, 2008).

The work of Hancock (2001) provides a valuable contribution to the study of gender relations, as he analyses the impact of industrial development on women’s status in West Java. He found that women who work in factories enhance their status in the family: women are more involved in the family decision-making process, more independent and contribute more to the family income than before they engaged in paid work (Hancock, 2001).

Numerous studies have reported the problems women workers face in factories such as long working hours, low wages, sexual harassment, discrimination, and poor health and safety at work (Tjandraningsih 2000). Women who work in factories are perceived as dependants of their husband or father and have inadequate workers’ rights (Matter, 1987; Wolf, 1992; Hancock, 2001; Warouw, 2004). For example, married female workers do not receive family allowance like that of male workers (Tjandraningsih, 2000). Nowadays, companies prefer women workers who are young, single and educated (at least secondary school completion). Thus, lower educated and married women find it harder to get jobs at factories (Tjandraningsih, 2000).
Some married women who are unable to compete with young unmarried women in the factories turn their work choices to family businesses with more flexible working hours where they can divide their roles as worker and care giver, or they give up paid work (Grijns et al., 1994). Wolf (1992) and Robinson (2009) also show similar findings: married women often give up work because they cannot find a relative or childcare facility to take care of their children. There is no suggestion that married men give up work because they have to look after their children.

There is some research related to health issues in West Java, because this region, generally speaking, has poor health, especially maternal – infant health. Infant mortality rates are high in this area (Utomo, 1996; Horikoshi, 1976). Research by Utomo (1996) in Indramayu showed that mothers tend to delay initiation of breast-feeding, are unlikely to discharge colostrum, and often feed their babies food, in preference to breast milk, during the first three months after birth, which causes a high risk of mortality. The maternal death rate is also high. Iskandar et al. (1995) found that some traditional beliefs are harmful to the pregnant woman, but many women still choose the traditional midwife over modern midwives for economic reasons (Iskandar et al., 1995). However, more recent studies (e.g. by Shefner-Rogers, 2004) indicate increasing knowledge about complications in pregnancy and positive attitudes regarding the choice of skilled health care providers for delivery who, with the support of the husband, can prevent maternal death.

Most Sundanese are Muslim, with different Islamic backgrounds ranging from conservative to liberal. Sundanese culture and Islam are inextricably bound together: Sundanese keenly identify themselves as Muslim as they are Sundanese (Newland, 2000; Kahmad, 2006). Islam was accepted by the Sundanese through education and *dakwah* (propagation) in the fifteen and sixteen centuries (Kahmad, 2006). The role of *ulama* and *kyai* as Islamic experts is significant in Sundanese society. Sometimes, they play roles as not only religious leaders, who teach Islamic knowledge and give advice in religious matters, but also social leaders,
who deal with the social and psychological problems of their congregation (Horikoshi, 1976). They wield charismatic influence over local as well as neighbouring residents - as can be seen in attendance at weekly or monthly preaching (Millie, 2008).

Marriage in Sundanese has social and religious significance. Marriage is strongly recommended, if not obligated, by social and religious norms. In West Java, as in many other regions in Indonesia, marriage establishes a person’s place in social life as an adult and a full member of society (Wessing, 1978; Grijns, 1987).

Marriage in West Java is considered a familial and communal event, not only uniting families but also involving community members. Thus, in most cases, marriage in West Java is considered parental business (obligation) (Muchtar & Umbara, 1977). Accordingly, parents’ approval of the marriage partner is important. Unlike the Sasak people of Lombok (Bennett, 2005a; Platt, 2010) or the Bugis, in South Sulawesi (Idrus, 2003), where elopement is common and acceptable, among the Sundanese this practice is uncommon.

In West Java, the ideal marriage partner should have four good qualities: bebet, babat, bobot, and bibit, literally meaning personal character, social equivalence, economic capability, and family background (Muchtar & Umbara, 1977). In arranged marriages, this judgment is made by parents with the aim of matching the future couple into a long lasting and harmonious married life. However, some cases of arranged marriage are also forced, and many end up in divorce. In recent times, arranged marriage has become less common, replaced by romantic or love marriage. More opportunities for education and employment for both sexes have meant more opportunities for socialising between the sexes.

The search for romantic love, usually called cinta (Ind.) or bogoh (Sund.) begins at around 14 to 15 years of age, during secondary school. In this stage it is usually called cinta monyet (puppy love) where the feeling of liking (suka)/loving (cinta) someone of the opposite sex is not yet serious (Smith-Hefner, 2005). In Sundanese this stage is known as kikindeuwan. When the feeling develops into “passionate
love”, usually at a more mature age, there is an “intense attraction that involves the intrusive thinking about one person within an erotic context” (Jankowiak & Paladino, 2008, p. 13). This uncontrolled feeling toward the loved one, in certain Indonesian cultural contexts, is sometimes associated with magic (Rottger-Rossler, 2008; Jennaway, 2002a, 2003). Among the Sundanese this heightened feeling is called kabungbulengan (confusion) and when the targeted person has the same feeling, they are called bobogohan (lover) (Muchtar & Umbara, 1977).

Understandings of courtship and courting behaviour differ across ethnic groups as well as between rural and urban areas of Indonesia. In rural society where adat and religion are strongly adhered to, as in West Sumatra, courtship is tightly controlled (Parker, 2009). For example, some people think that holding hands with a girlfriend or boyfriend can arouse sexual desire that can lead to illicit sex (zina). In contrast, in urban and heterogeneous social contexts like Jakarta, courtship behaviour is loosely monitored and pre-marital sex is reportedly common among youth (Utomo, 2002).

In arranged marriage, love does not precede married life. Many couples hardly know each other before marriage. They are told by older people that love will grow gradually later on. The gradual development of love and affection in married life in Indonesia is well presented by Rottger-Rossler (2008) in her research on arranged marriage among the Makassarese of South Sulawesi. She reports the gradual development of feeling from total strangeness with no emotion, to intense feeling of love and intimacy (ammaling-maling) and mutual respect (sikatutui) across the duration of married life (Rottger-Rossler, 2008, p. 151). In Sundanese, the highest level of feeling to develop between the couple next to love (bogoh) is nyaah (affection), where the couple shows mutual caring and respect and they avoid hurting each other.

A brief explanation of the marriage process in Sunda is provided here. The marriage process has several steps, namely neundeun omong (entrusting a message), nyeureuhan (symbolic acceptance), lamaran (marriage proposal),
seserahan (assigning) and ijab kabul (marriage contract). Before an official marriage proposal, the boy’s parents, represented by his father, informally ask the girl’s parents about the possibility of proposing. This is called neundeun omong (Muchtar & Umbara, 1977). When the girl’s parents have agreed, the next stage is nyeureuhan (from seureuh, lit. betel leaf), which symbolically means the acceptance.\(^5\) Several weeks before the wedding day, the process of lamaran (marriage proposal) takes place, where the boy’s family proposes officially. The exchange of rings may also take place as a symbol that the couple is already taken and no one can make another proposal. Some couples get engaged if they wish to be bonded to each other but are not ready yet to marry; it could take months or years until they decide to marry. By contrast, in the lamaran process the family sets the wedding date soon after. The wedding feast is organised by the girl’s family and mostly held in the girl’s house. These days, many weddings are held in rented halls or hotel ballrooms for rich families.

On the wedding day, the rite begins with welcoming the groom and his family, known as seserahan. The marriage ceremony (Ind. akad nikah, Sund. rapalan) is usually set at 9.00 am with the presence of the official marriage registrar from the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). Akad nikah is usually held either in the girl’s house or in the mosque nearby the wedding venue. Apart from the bride and the groom, the marriage registrar, the bride’s guardian (wali) and two witnesses are required for a valid Islamic marriage. The offer and acceptance, called ijab kabul, takes place between the groom and the bride’s guardian, usually the father, or the male agnate. The ijab kabul is in Indonesian, Sundanese or Arabic, depending on the ability of the groom and the guardian.

Following the validation of the marriage contract by the KUA officer, the couple signs the marriage book (buku nikah) that has been prepared by the marriage registrar. The marriage book comes in two colours (see figure 3): green for the

\(^5\)Nyereuh or nyeupah is chewing the betel leaf after putting the lime and areca nut inside the leaf. Previously, in Sundanese tradition, nyereuh or nyeupah was widely practised by men and women alike at celebrations (Muchtar & Umbara, 1977). This tradition no longer exists in Sundanese culture except for a very limited rural area.
bride and brown for the groom; the content is the same. This ceremony ends with sungkeman (getting the blessing) from both parents.

![Indonesian marriage book](image)

**Figure 3**: Indonesian marriage book (*buku nikah*)

The bride and the groom are then seated in a special chair to receive the blessing from guests. Some couples perform other rituals such as *nyawer* (lit. sprinkling rice, turmeric and coins as blessing for fortune) and *huap lingkung* (feeding each other) as a symbol of togetherness (Muchtar & Umbara, 1977). Nowadays, in West Java, and in Central Java, these traditional rituals are less often practised because the couple tend to focus on Islamic requirements (cf. Smith-Hefner, 2005).

Traditionally, West Java was known for its high rate of early marriage, with girls marrying as young as 10 to 13 years old and even before the age of 10 (McDonald & Abdurrahman, 1974). *Kawin gantung* (suspended marriage) was also being practised in several areas in West Java, where the girl was married off by her parents before the age of 10 but remained living in her parents’ house to prevent cohabitation until a proper age (McDonald & Abdurrahman, 1974; Wessing, 1978). Nowadays, as reported by many researchers, child marriage in West Java is less common than before.

In the second half of the twentieth century, there have been changes to marriage patterns in Southeast Asia in general and in Indonesia in particular (Jones, Hull, & Mohamad, 2011). In Indonesia, the increased age of marriage, increased education and women’s participation in paid work are factors influencing this new marriage pattern (Jones, Asari, & Djuartika, 1994; Jones, et al., 2011). This
new trend of marriage in Indonesia in general shows that women tend to delay marriage and choose their own partner. Data reported by Jones and Gubhayu (2011, p. 50) show that in 1971 the percentage of females who remained single at age 20 – 24 was 18.5 percent, increasing significantly to 35.7 percent in 1990 and 51.4 percent in 2005. Among females aged 25 – 29 the data also indicate an increasing trend of delayed marriage from 5.0 percent in 1971 to 11.2 percent in 1990 and 19.7 percent in 2005 (Jones & Gubhayu, 2011, p. 50). In West Java, the average age of marriage for women now is 22.9 years old (Jones & Gubhayu, 2011, p. 51). The trend for women to remain single at the age of 30 and over has been identified not only among middle class, educated urban women but also among the lower socio-economic class as reported by Situmorang (2011) in West Java. According to Jones and Gubhayu (2011), West Java is no longer the province with the earliest marriage age. They (2011, p. 53) further argue that “strong cosmopolitanizing” in urban areas like Bandung and the migration of people from Jakarta to suburban areas surrounding it are influencing marriage patterns in West Java.

West Java is also known for its high rate of divorce. Factors associated with this high rate of divorce are early marriage, infertility, low education and low income (McDonald & Abdurrahman, 1974, p. 20, 26; Jones et al., 1994, p. 407). Surveys in this province indicated that most divorces happen in the early years of marriage (McDonald & Abdurrahman, 1974, p. 20; Jones et al., 1994, p. 398). However, as many researchers of West Java have reported (McDonald & Abdurrahman, 1974; Zuidberg, 1978; Jones et al., 1994) this does mean that the institution of marriage is declining. Many divorces are followed by remarriage. Currently, however, the divorce rate remains high in West Java, with most applications for divorce lodged by the wife. Data from the Religious Court of the city of Bandung showed that in 2003, of the 1,871 divorce cases lodged, 505 were submitted by husbands and 1,207 cases by wives. The number of divorce cases had increased significantly by 2013 with 5,134 divorce cases: 1,130 cases were lodged by husbands and 3,440 by wives (Pengadilan Agama Kota Bandung, 2014). This data
may be seen as a positive indication by women activists that women are no longer content to stay in unhappy marriages. However, on the other hand, the women who file for divorce may be viewed by the community as transgressing the ideal of the submissive and obedient wife (Parker, Riyani, & Nolan, 2015).

**Sexuality Research in Indonesia**

This section reviews the literature concerning sexuality in Indonesia. This review is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the definition of gender and sexuality. The second part explores sexuality research in Indonesia. This review will highlight that there is very little research directed towards women’s sexuality in Indonesia, in particular married women’s sexuality. The aim of this thesis is to fill this research gap by exploring how religion influences discourses of sexuality in Indonesia, in particular how Islamic teachings influence Muslim married women’s perceptions and behaviour in their marital sexual relationships. By doing this, this research will contribute significantly to the understanding of sexuality in Indonesia.

The term sexuality used in this research refers to social constructions of sexuality. Sexuality, according to the social constructionists, is not merely a biological identification, but also a product of social, cultural and historical processes (Weeks, 1989). Sexuality refers to the quality of being sexual that involves feelings, desires, practices, values, beliefs, and behaviour (Oakley, 1972; Jackson, 1978).

The notion that sexuality is connected to biology is powerful. This opinion dominates in many societies, including Indonesia. In Indonesia, the dominant gender discourses deployed by the New Order regime are situated within heterosexual practice (Blackwood, 2010, Wieringa, 2012). Heteronormativity is the term that “informs the normativity of daily life, including institutions, laws and regulations that impact on the sexual and reproductive lives of members of society as well as the moral imperatives that influence people’s personal lives”
According to this norm, socially standard and normal sexual activity occurs only between a man and a woman. The woman should be passive and submissive, and sexual relations should aim at reproduction (Wieringa, Katjasungkana, & Hidayana, 2007).

In the Indonesian context, (hetero) sexual relations are only sanctioned within marriage. This norm is backed through media, educational institutions, family, and state regulations. Other expressions of sexuality such as gay, lesbian, waria (transgender), premarital and extramarital sex are considered deviant and are therefore stigmatised (Blackwood, 2010, Wieringa, 2012). Boellstorff (2005) reports that gay men in Indonesia struggle between expressing their desire and surrendering to the standard norms, and among gay Muslims, they fear their behaviour is sinful.

The institutionalisation of heterosexual relations has neglected the discussion and experience of women’s sexuality in Indonesia. My research, therefore, tries to explore the experiences of married women in their sexual relationships with their husbands.

**Gender and Sexuality: The Indonesian Context**

The term gender (jender) and sexuality (seksualitas) are new terms for Indonesian society (Blackwood, 2010). They are usually associated with biological sex or jenis kelamin (lit. genitalia) (Bennett, 2005a; Davies, 2010). Unlike sex, which refers to biological aspects of being male and female, gender is a socio-cultural construction attributed to men and women that differentiate their “roles, function and responsibilities” in a given society (Jauhola, 2012, p. 20). Similarly, sexuality is a social and cultural construction embedded in the social and cultural context and varies according to social and cultural contexts.

In Indonesia, the attribution of gender and sexuality starts early, when a baby is born, and even while the baby is in the mother’s womb. The child’s clothes, toys, wrapped gifts and the ceremonies show these differences. At the different life-
stages, the child learns different social norms and values according to its gender. Girls learn how to behave gracefully, to talk softly, to dress modestly, to guard their chastity, to be shy and to be silent. They also learn to do housework at an early age to help their mothers. Meanwhile, boys learn to be strong and brave and that it is acceptable to be a bit naughty (nakal). These processes are reinforced by encounters with people in the family, at school, in religious institutions and in broader society. In this way, gender norms are strongly embedded and influence the daily practices and relationships of women and men.

In this research, I argue that the regulation of gender and sexuality in Indonesia is influenced by various discourses, narratives and norms. The practice and categorisation of gender and sexuality vary among regions in Indonesia. Different interpretations of Islamic teaching tend to regulate gender and sexuality in various ways. Different Indonesian governments in different eras have employed different gender and sexual ideologies: the Old Order of Soekarno (1945 – 1966), the New Order of Soeharto (1966 – 1998) and the Reformasi (1998 – recent) era. Because of the limits of this project, I will focus on the contemporary debates on gender and sexuality in the Reform era, with particular attention to Islamic influences on women’s sexuality.

Many scholars argue that the gender ideology of the New Order era was taught systematically over its duration through school, family, community events and government development programmes and policies. During the Reformasi era this gender ideology has been challenged by many gender activists promoting democracy and human rights. They demand more equal relations between women and men, encouraging women’s participation in the public sphere, in politics, in education, in employment as well as at home (White & Anshor, 2004; Brenner, 2011). Challenges to the earlier gender ideology have resulted in the opportunity for women to become president, the employment of women in various occupations, and the enactment of Law No. 23 on the Eradication of Domestic Violence, 2004 (UU PKDRT). However, along with this government support for democracy and human rights emerged a very conservative
interpretation of Islam. The moderate groups who promote democracy and
gender equality are “facing serious new challenges” because the conservative
movements threaten their efforts (Hefner, 2008, p. 39). The conservative
organisations influence politics and government regulations, for example in the
establishment of some shari’-a-based local governments and the Anti-
Pornography Law No. 44, 2008 (White & Anshor, 2004; Hefner, 2008; Brenner,
2011; Feillard & Van Doorn-Harder, 2013).

Religion has the potential to be one of the most influential institutions in
transforming society. It is “among the foremost of institutions which conserve
society, encoding stabilizing worldviews and values and transmitting these from
generation to generation” (Falk, 1985, p. xv). Thus, it can also be a force for the
reproduction of society, its values and norms. In regulating gender and sexuality,
religion also influences its adherents through its precepts. Islam, as the
predominant religion in Indonesia, influences the organisation of gender and
sexuality in Indonesia. This research aims to investigate the influence of Islamic
teachings of sexuality on married women’s perceptions and behaviour in their
marital sexual relationships.

Research on Sexuality in Indonesia

In Indonesia, research on sexuality has been conducted by several scholars from
different perspectives. Scholars have addressed various topics: adolescent
sexuality (Simon & Paxton, 2004; Holzner & Oetomo, 2004; Parker 2008; Utomo &
McDonald, 2009), same-sex relations (Blackwood, 1998; Oetomo, 1996; Howard,
1996; Wieringa, 1999; Murray, 1999; Boellstorff, 2003, 2005; Davies, 2010), sexual
violence (Idrus, 2001; Bennett, Andajani-Sutjahjo, Idrus, 2011; Binahayati, 2011),
Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STDs) (Kroeger, 2000), prostitution (Murray, 1991;
Hull, Sulistyaningsih & Jones, 1997) and pornography (Bungin, 2003).

Research on adolescent sexuality in Indonesia mainly examines changing sexual
patterns of adolescents, from abstinence to more permissive engagement in
premarital sex (Simon & Paxton, 2004; Holzner & Oetomo, 2004; Purdy 2006; Utomo & McDonald, 2009). Utomo and McDonald (2009) stated that this change in youth attitudes and behaviour resulted from various influences such as global media, education and westernisation. This permissiveness can lead to unwanted pregnancies and illegal and unsafe abortions. Many youth in Indonesia have limited knowledge of safe sex as a result of limited services providing adolescents with information on sexual and reproductive rights (Bennett, 2005a).

In contrast to the above-mentioned research on active adolescent sexuality in Indonesia, research by Parker (2008) and Bennett (2007) presents a rather different picture of adolescents in Indonesia. Apart from the fact that they are active sexual agents, adolescents in Indonesia also have something to offer as the next generation of this country: their dedication to education, morality and religion. Parker (2008, p. 4) shows that “something different happens” in Indonesian adolescence concerning their sexuality. She indicates that adolescents in Indonesia can be diligent, industrious and ambitious in their study to work for a bright future (Parker, 2008).

Almost all the researchers agree that sex education in Indonesia is crucial, not only providing young people with useful information concerning their sexuality and rights but also enhancing their understanding of their sexual responsibilities, e.g. toward their partners, regarding pregnancy, and sexual diseases. Research by Utomo (2003) and Parker (2008) among school students shows that almost all respondents are keen to have sex education in their school curricula. Many school students have very little information concerning their sexuality, as parents usually do not provide it.

In providing sex education in Indonesia, Bennett (2007) suggests that religious values and cultural norms should be considered. She says that the Indonesian government has the obligation to ensure “the provision of comprehensive and religiously appropriate sex education for Indonesia’s Muslim youth” (p. 383). Bennett (2007) further reports that some pesantren have established sex education
and reproductive rights in their curricula. Some of the organisations that actively promote sexual and reproductive rights in 

*pesantren* are P3M (the Society for *Pesantren* and Community Development), FK3 (Forum for the Study of Kitab Kuning), Rahima and the Fahmina Institute (Sciortino, Marcoes-Natsir, & Masudi, 1996; White & Anshor, 2004; Rinaldo, 2010; Brenner, 2011; Feillard & Van Doorn-Harder, 2013).

Alternative sexualities in Indonesia have gained visibility since the 1980s (Blackwood, 2007). Transgender identities are more visible than male homosexuality and lesbianism. Terms related to homosexuality, like the words ‘lesbi’ and ‘gay’, have been borrowed from English through the media (Blackwood, 1995a; Boellstorff, 2003). Blackwood (2007) argues that the representation of these alternative sexualities in Indonesia is stigmatised and even criminalised. Many gay and lesbian Indonesians consider themselves as ‘sakit’ (ill) (Howard, 1996; Murray, 1999; Blackwood, 1998; Boellstorff, 2005). Some gay Muslims associate their gayness with sin (Boellstorff, 2005). This is the main reason gays and lesbians hide their identity from their family and society (Offord, 2003). However, research by Davies (2010) on calabai (transgender males) and bissu (androgynous shamans) revealed that they are well recognised and accepted in the Bugis cultural context as they have traditional roles in the community, but calalai (transgender females) are less visible than calabai.

Research on women’s sexuality in Indonesia is limited. Bennett has made a significant contribution with her work on single Muslim women’s sexuality in Lombok (2005a). She explored single women’s identities, expression of desires, relationships and lifestyles prior to marriage. She reported that for single women, the social regulation of women’s sexuality is emphasised by guarding their purity. Virginity is highly valued before marriage and guarding one’s reputation is an important aspect of being a prospective wife (Bennett, 2005a). (See also Idrus, 2003 on the Bugis). Kholifah (2005) also examined the experience of single young women, particularly in the *pesantren* community. She showed that sexual
fantasy and desire are common among them, but young female santri (students) try to ignore those fantasies and desires (Kholifah, 2005).

Likewise, research on married women’s sexuality is quite limited. Sexual experiences and sexuality within the marital relationship in Indonesia are considered private. Lily Zakiah Munir (2002) investigated power within the marital sexual relationship in Java. She found that Javanese marriage is “a hierarchical-based relationship”, and that sexual relations are based on inequality (Munir, 2002, p. 193). She noted that Javanese tradition and a gender-biased interpretation of Islamic teaching supported each other in promoting women’s sexual subordination (Munir, 2002). In her book on polygyny, Nurmila (2009) did not discuss sex in polygynous marriage very much at all, but she did find that disgust and jealousy interfered with the sexual pleasure of women in polygynous marriages (Nurmila, 2009). Polygyny as practised by Indonesian men is merely about addressing men’s sexual drive and ignores women’s sexual desire (Wichelen, 2010).

Sexual violence in marriage is reportedly common in Indonesia. Research by Idrus (2001), Bennett et al., (2011) and Binahayati (2011) found that many women experience violence in their marital relationships. Bennett et al. (2011, p. 156) reported that sexual abuse at home was high. Idrus (2001, p. 46) confirms that sexual violence within marriage is considered “normal” and sometimes it is used as a way to show the man’s superiority over his wife (Idrus, 2001). Nevertheless, as Binahayati (2011) reported, although women experienced violence from their husbands, rarely did they report it despite the enactment of the Law against domestic violence, as mentioned above.

The discussion of desire and pleasure is absent from academic discussion on women’s sexuality. Taboo, shame and silence characterise the discussion of female sexuality. Bennett (2005a) notes that it is not easy for women to explore sexual desires and pleasure in Indonesia. As Jennaway reports (2003), their desires are denied in the Indonesian cultural context.
Women’s sexuality is controlled and regulated. In Indonesian culture, religion and the state have significant influence in controlling women’s sexuality. In general, women are ordered to control their desire. In Makassar, where the majority are Muslim, Idrus (2003) reported that daughters should be closely monitored and guarded by male family members to protect the family honour (siri). The women, therefore, should guard their behaviour, which includes not flirting with men or engaging in sex (Idrus, 2003). Similarly, in Lombok, single women have to be polite and refined to avoid damaging their reputation as respectable prospective wives (Bennett, 2005a). In Bali, where most people are Hindus, single women also should not act too aggressively, dress modestly and guard their chastity (Jennaway, 2002a), while married women should be “neither seductive nor lustful” (Parker, 2001, p. 182).

Religion, Islam in particular, mostly shares prescriptions with adat concerning women’s sexuality (Munir, 2002; Idrus, 2003; Bennett, 2005a; Platt, 2010). They reinforce each other to control women’s body and sexuality. For example, the notion of zina, an Islamic term for illicit sexual relations, is emphasised more for women than for men. Men who commit zina are more tolerated than women (Bennett, 2005b). Women maintain their good reputation in public by choosing appropriate dress. In this case, veiling (wearing the Islamic headscarf, jilbab) is one form of controlling the female body and both male and female sexuality.

In the Reform era, one of the most contested debates concerning sexuality was the Anti-Pornography Law no. 44 of 2008. Instead of banning the production and circulation of pornography material, the Pornography Law mostly emphasises public morality. It targets women’s dress, women’s body and women’s mobility (Feillard & Van Doorn-Harder, 2013). It also criminalises a variety of sexual practices (Wichelen, 2010). It seems that in the Reformasi era, the government is strongly influenced by more conservative Islamic groups aiming to control public morality (Wichelen, 2010; Brenner, 2011).
In the above literature, most scholarly attention is directed at issues concerning same sex and premarital sexuality. Little attention is given to the study of women’s sexuality in the marital relationship. Sexual relations in marriage are usually considered normal and therefore unproblematic. In Indonesia, a considerable amount of research has been done on same sex relations and very little on “hegemonic heterosexuality” (Parker (2008, paragraf. 19). Although there are many studies on kinship, marriage and family in Indonesia, the sexual life of the married couple has not been a focus of research. This research addresses this gap, contributing to the understanding of women’s sexual experiences in marriage and of the influence of Islamic teachings on their sexuality.

**Marriage and Sexuality: Islamic Perspectives**

This section discusses marriage and sexuality in Islam. It explores Islamic regulation of marriage and sexuality and the literature on these topics. I divide the section into two parts. The first part discusses important topics associated with marriage such as the requirements of marriage, rights and duties, mahar (bride price), marriage partner preferences and divorce. It also provides detailed discussion of polygyny, men’s authority in marriage and attempts at the reform of marriage law in Muslim societies. The second part explores sexuality issues in Muslim societies: female sexuality associated with fitnah and ‘awra, virginity, female circumcision, family planning, contraception, abortion, rape, and zina. This part also presents the criticisms of Muslim scholars toward traditional norms of sex and sexuality. These topics are central to the discussion of women’s experiences of marriage and sexuality in the data chapters, as many women referred to the Islamic perspectives as their guide.

The regulation of marriage and sexuality in Islam is derived from Islamic texts, and not necessarily taken from the Qur’an alone. Sources include the Hadith, interpretations of the Qur’an and Hadith, and Islamic law. Because there are various sources, it is worth addressing the diversity of understandings and
practices of these topics in Muslim societies. In reality, the application of such understandings varies according to time and context.

The Qur’an is believed to be God’s message verbatim and is the highest and the primary source of Islam. However, there are a huge number of interpretations recorded over a long period by many Muslim scholars (ulama). Along with the Qur’anic interpretations, the ulama formed Islamic law in the eighth century (Hallaq, 2009). Islamic law is a product of human history and socio-cultural understandings of Islamic texts. The development of Islamic law involved a dialectical process of interaction with particular cases of social, moral and material conditions in social reality (Hallaq, 2009). It is subject to change in accordance with changes in society. Diversity among the four schools of law (madzhab) in Islam shows this process of construction in different places and times associated with different social, cultural and political conditions (Mas’ud, 2009). There are four schools of law (madzhab) in Sunni Islam, namely, Hanbali, Maliki, Hanafi and Shafi’I named after its founder. The majority of Muslims in Indonesia follow Shafi’i school.

**Marriage in Islam**

Marriage is highly recommended by Islam. It is related to guarding one’s chastity (Q 4: 25). Marriage in Islam is a contract between two parties as part of Sunnah (practised by the Prophet Muhammad). Marriage according to Islam lies between ibadah (religious duty) and mu’amalah (social/private action). Thus getting married is not only a matter of social and inter-personal relations but also a matter of obeying one of God’s commands. Thus, celibacy is unsupported in Islam. Many Islamic texts make this recommendation:

Marry those among you who are single, or the virtuous ones among yourselves, male or female. If they are in poverty, Allah will give them means out of His grace: For Allah encompasseth all, and he knoweth all things. (Q. 24: 32)

Narrated Abdullah: We were with the Prophet while we were young and had no wealth whatever. So Allah’s Apostle said, "O young
people! Whoever among you can marry, should marry, because it helps him lower his gaze and guard his modesty (i.e. his private parts from committing illegal sexual intercourse etc.), and whoever is not able to marry, should fast, as fasting diminishes his sexual power.” (Bukhari, 1971, Hadith no. 4, vol. 7)

Traditional Muslim scholars have written extensively about marriage. Two *kitab* are referred to in discussing marriage: *Fiqh ala Madzahib al-Arba’a* from Al-Jaziry (2003) and *al-Fiqh al-Islam wa Adillatuhu* by Zuhaily (1985), and they provide opinions from the four Sunni Muslim legal schools. Here I present some of the key issues in discussing marriage in Islam, mostly in reference to the Shafi’i school of law as the most preferred and followed *madzhab* in Indonesia (Feener, 2007). This preference is significant to the discussion of my findings for this research, but in several places, I also provide different opinions from other schools.

**Definition**

Marriage in Islam is called *nikah*. Another word that is usually used with the same meaning is *zawaj*. The word *nikah*, originally, meant sexual intercourse (*wath’, dlom’*) but it also referred to the marriage contract (Al-Jaziry, 2003). The Qur’an uses both words (*nikah* and *zawaj*) to refer to both meanings.

Shafi’i jurists define *nikah* as "a contract that grants [the two parties] a permissible sexual enjoyment (*milc wath’*) using the word *inkah* (*n-k-h*) or *tazwij* (*z-w-j*)" (Al-Jaziry, 2003, p. 8). Definitions by other jurists have similar meanings, recognising *nikah* as a contract that allows a man (specifically) to enjoy a woman sexually (not limited to intercourse) (Al-Jaziry, 2003).

The definition of marriage derived from the Muslim jurists implies that the primary purpose and meaning of marriage is a contractual deed to organise the sexual life of man and woman in a lawful manner to form family in society. The contract has individual and social significance. It is the contract that permits two persons to engage in sex, which was previously forbidden them, in accordance with the social and religious consensus. However, as seen from the definition,
this sexual engagement gives priority to a man to enjoy sex from a woman and not the other way around. This definition of marriage is usually used by men to claim that sex in marriage is the husband’s right.

From the definition, it also can be inferred that the purpose of marriage is procreation as a possible result of sexual activity. The verse (Q. 16: 72) mentions:

And Allah has made for you mates (and companions) of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren, and provided for you sustenance of the best.

Marriage establishes the propagation of the human species, establishing the existence of the Muslim ummah (society), and easy recognition of the children born as legitimate for guardianship and parentage.

**The Requirements for a Valid Marriage**

According to the Shafi’i school, a valid marriage should meet five requirements: (1) prospective husband, (2) prospective wife, (3) guardianship, (4) two witnesses, and (5) the offer and the acceptance (ijab and qabul) (Al-Jaziry, 2003, p. 32). The *ijab* and *qabul* is performed between the prospective husband and the woman’s guardian (*wali*). The woman’s guardian should be from the male line and preferably the father, grandfather, brother, or uncle. Accordingly, a woman cannot perform marriage on her own behalf; it is invalid according to the Shafi’i madzhab. However, the Hanafi madzhab stipulates that an adult woman, single or widowed, can marry without a guardian acting on her behalf (Al-Jaziry, 2003, p. 34).

In the Indonesian Marriage Law, which is influenced by the Shafi’i School, the *wali* is essential for a valid marriage. There are two kinds of *wali*: first, the agnate *wali*: includes father, grandfather, brothers and uncles from the male line; and the second, a judge (*wali hakim*), in case there are no relatives available in the family because of death, absence or refusal. *Wali hakim* is the *wali* appointed by the
government to perform the marriage. In Indonesia, the role is assigned to the head of KUA in the district where the marriage takes place.

Another requirement that needs to be fulfilled during the marriage contract is the payment of *mahr*. *Mahr* (*mas kawin* in Indonesian) is a gift given to the woman from the husband by virtue of the marriage contract as a sign of love (Q. 4: 4, 20, 24, 25). Much of the literature discussing *mahr* translates it as dowry, but it is best translated as bride price. Many jurists consider the payment of the bride price (*mahr*) as an exchange for the husband’s sexual access to his wife based on the interpretation of Q. 4: 24 and 2: 237:

> And unto those with whom you desire to enjoy marriage, you shall give the dowers due to them; but you will incur no sin if, after [having agreed upon] this lawful due, you freely agree with one another upon anything [else]. (Q. 4: 24)

Almost all schools of law in Islam agree that *mahr* is a kind of compensation paid by the husband for his sexual enjoyment of his wife (Zuhaily, 1985, p. 99).

Kecia Ali (2006a) criticises this classical jurisprudence regulation of marriage as the jurists tend to classify it under the term ‘*milk*’, which means “ownership, dominion or control” (p. xxv), as the basis for lawful sexual activity. In the jurists’ opinion, the bride price is an exchange for *milk nikah*: the husband’s exclusive dominion over his wife (Ali, 2006a). Ali says that this kind of logic is used to justify the assumption that the wife should be sexually available to the husband (Ali, 2006a).

When the contract is valid, it assigns certain duties and rights to each of the married couple. The husband’s duties become the wife’s rights and *vice versa*, which will be discussed below.

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6The two terms bride price and dowry are often confused. Bride price can be defined as “property or money presented by a bridegroom to his bride’s relatives in recognition of the marriage” (Macquarie Dictionary, 2009, p. 213) while dowry is “the money, goods, or estate which a woman brings to her husband at marriage” (p. 504). Dowry is often familial property transferred from parents to the daughter upon her marriage, and is typical of South Asian societies (Goody, 1973; Tambiah, 1973).
Rights and Obligations

The allocation of rights and obligations in marriage for both partners varies from one jurist to another. Different schools of law state different rights and obligations and seem to expand beyond what is stated in the Qur’an. However, two basic duties and rights that are believed to be complementary, and have almost become the consensus among the majority of jurists, are *nafaqa* (Ind. *nafkah*; maintenance) for the husband and *ta’at* (obedience) for the wife. *Nafaqa* is material support that the husband is obliged to provide when he enters married life. This idea is referred to in the Q. 2: 233 and Q. 4:34 (I will explain the latter verse in more detail below). *Ta’at* is considered a wife’s duty toward her husband. Most of the jurists agree that because a husband gives *nafaqa*, he deserves her obedience (Zuhaily, 1985). The mutual duties and rights as stated in the Qur’an are: (1) to treat each other adequately (Q. 4: 19); (2) to create marriage in mutual love and affection (Q. 30: 21); and (3) to protect the family from any harm and misconduct (Q. 66: 6).

Marriage Partner

In finding a marriage partner, Islam prescribes which partners are permissible and which are forbidden. The preferred marriage partners based on the Qur’an are single, virtuous people who are believers (*mu’minin*) (Q. 24: 32; 4: 25). While seeking partners from among *musyrikun* (the worshiper of idols) is forbidden for Muslim men and Muslim women (Q.2: 221), inter-religious marriage with ‘people of the Book’ (*ahl kitab*) is permissible for Muslim men only (Q. 5: 5). The Qur’an also lists several types of persons one is forbidden to marry and they are called *mahram*. They are prohibited by a blood relationship, by affinity, and by fosterage.8

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7 The Qur’an distinguishes between *musyrikun* and *ahl kitab*: the former refer to those who worship gods other than one God and the latter associate with Christian and Jews (Gimaret, 1997).

8 Those persons who are considered *mahram* include: mothers, daughters, sisters, paternal and maternal aunts, brother’s and sister’s daughters, foster sisters, mothers in law, step daughters who are under one’s protection, and father’s wife.
The Hadith also report the criteria for selecting a marriage partner. The term *kafa’ah* (*kufu’*-Arabic, *sepadan*-Indonesian; equivalence) is an important aspect in selecting a mate. There are four *kafa’ah* criteria that should be considered in selecting a mate, namely, wealth (*maal*), beauty (*jamal*), lineage (*hashb*) and religion (*diin*). These criteria were set to avoid a significant relational gap in married life – though in practice, these criteria are not always applicable.

**Polygyny**

Polygyny is a hot topic in discussions on Islamic marriage. The issue emerged in relation to Q. 4: 3:

> If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one.

In fact, the passage is concerned with the treatment of orphans, not polygyny (Wadud, 1999; Nurmila, 2006). The practice of polygyny is not without strict requirements, as stated in the above Qur’anic verse. Many progressive scholars believe that God’s permission to marry up to four women is not to be practised in general but only in very strict and special cases (Al-Hibri, 1982; Shahrur, 1994; Wadud, 1999; Abu Zayd, 2000). In addition, some commentators link to another verse, Q. 4: 129, which state that men will never be able to do justice to several wives. They argue that this verse should be interpreted as indicating that polygyny is impossible to practise (Wadud, 2006).

In practice, however, many Muslim men understand Q. 4: 3 as permission to practise polygyny. The polygyny proponents seem to ignore the conditions associated with polygyny. In Indonesia, as reported by Nurlaelawati (2013), the

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9The criteria are derived from Hadith narrated by Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "A woman is married for four things, i.e., her wealth, her family status, her beauty and her religion. So you should marry the religious woman (otherwise) you will be a loser." (Bukhari, 1971, Hadith no. 27, vol. 7).

10Q. 4: 129: “You will never be able to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire to do so, but do not ignore one wife altogether, leaving her suspended [between marriage and divorce].”
courts grant permission for husbands proposing polygyny on the grounds of the husband’s high sexual desire. Barlas (2002) argues that this verse does not serve a sexual function, but that in fact the polygyny verse should be seen as a restriction of polygyny, to be practised only when a special requirement (i.e. justice for orphans) is to be satisfied; it was not intended primarily to satisfy sexual desire.

**Divorce**

Islam gives both parties the right to report for divorce (Q. 2: 229). Dissolution of marriage, apart from death, can take three forms: *thalaq* (lit. release), *khulu’* (lit. compensation), and *fasakh* (lit. annul).

*Thalaq* is repudiation by the husband to terminate the marriage and is unilateral. According to the Muslim jurists’ consensus, the husband can simply pronounce “I divorce you” and it is considered a valid form of divorce. In many Muslim countries, this practice has been restricted by regulating that a divorce is valid only when it is registered with the court.

*Thalaq* can be divided into two categories: revocable (*thalaq raj’i*) and irrevocable (*thalaq ba’in*) (Al-Jaziry, 2003, p. 282). *Thalaq raj’i* is when the husband pronounces divorce once or twice. In *thalaq raj’i* the husband can take back the wife either during the ‘*iddah* (waiting period after divorce) or after ‘*iddah*. *Thalaq ba’in* (irrevocable divorce) is when the husband pronounces triple divorce at one time (‘I divorce you, I divorce you, and I divorce you’) or he divorces his wife for the third time (after twice reconciling with her). When the husband pronounces *thalaq ba’in*, he cannot return to his former wife unless she has married another man, consummated the marriage and then she is separated by divorce or death from her second marriage (Q 2: 230).

The Qur’an, in fact, only permits divorce twice and does not encourage a third divorce. Most jurists also reject a third divorce. The purpose is to prevent the uncertainty of divorce by a man toward his wife and to encourage men to be careful in pronouncing divorce. However, in many Muslim societies, many cases
show that the husband pronounces triple *thalaq* in one sitting, with or without the intention to do so (because he is drunk or angry) (Arshad, 2010).

The second form of divorce is called *khulu’*. *Khulu’* is dissolution of marriage requested by the wife with the husband’s consent, by giving the husband certain compensation (Al-Jaziry, 2003, 346). The compensation can be either returning the *mahr* or paying him financial compensation agreed by both parties (*jawadi*) as stated in Q. 2: 229.

The third form of divorce is *fasakh*. *Fasakh* is annulment of the marriage for reasons such as failure to fulfill marriage requirements or other circumstances deemed harmful to the marriage. The verdict should take place in the court and be made by a judge. Conditions that enable both parties to report for divorce include failure by the husband to pay maintenance, desertion and maltreatment. In Indonesia, these three conditions are called *shighat taklik talak* (see figure 4) and are printed at the back of the marriage book (*buku nikah*).

![Figure 4: Shighat Taklik Talak](image)

*‘Iddah and Maintenance after Divorce*

*‘Iddah* is a certain period, during which both parties have to wait, after the dissolution of a marriage either by divorce or by death. The *‘iddah* for divorced women is three menstrual cycles (Q 2: 228). The idea of this *‘iddah* is to give time
for both parties to consider reconciliation of the marriage, and to ascertain that the woman is not pregnant from her previous husband in order to prevent dispute over lineage and guardianship of possible children. Within this period the wife should not marry another man, except if the husband wants to reunite. If the divorce took place while the wife was pregnant, then the waiting period for her is until delivery (Q 65: 4). 'Iddah does not apply for divorcees who have not had sexual intercourse with their husband (Q 33: 49). The 'iddah for women who no longer menstruate or who have not yet started to menstruate is three months (Q 65: 4). By contrast, there is no certain 'iddah assigned to men after divorce, meaning that they can marry other women as soon as they please. In the case of marital separation by death, 'iddah for both sexes is four months and ten days (Q 2: 234).

During the period of 'iddah, the divorced woman is entitled to maintenance in a suitable manner (Q 2: 241). The divorced pregnant woman is entitled to maintenance and housing until she delivers the baby. If she breast-feeds the baby, both of them are entitled to maintenance. In the case that the ex-wife cannot nurse the baby, with mutual consent the parents can hire another woman to breast-feed the baby (Q 2: 233; 65:6); when the former husband has died, his heir is responsible for taking care of his ex-wife and the baby. The widow can spend time in her husband’s house and she is entitled to maintenance for one year. The family of her husband should look after and treat her kindly (Q 2: 240).

The Concept of Men’s Authority over Women

Men are the protectors and maintainers of (qawwamun ‘ala) women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) (faddala) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women (shalihaat) are devoutly obedient (qanitat), and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct (nushuz), admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (idribu) (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against
them means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).
(Q. 4:34)

There are three key terms in this verse that represent three themes: *qawwam*, *nushuz* and *daraba*, often translated respectively as men’s authority, women’s disobedience and the striking of one’s wife. There have been various translations, interpretations and understandings of this verse from Muslim scholars since the first time the verse was revealed.

The word *qawwamun* has been translated in English translations of the Qur’an as “in charge of,”11 “maintainers,”12 “protectors and maintainers,”13 “the support”14 and “take full care.”15 The traditionalist interpretation of this verse can be traced back to Al-Thabari (839-923), one of the well-known classic Qur’anic interpreters, and his interpretation is considered the most cited interpretation to date (Dunn and Kellison, 2010). According to Al-Thabari, men’s authority over women is limited to financial matters, as the verse states clearly (Thabari, 1992). Other traditionalist interpreters after al-Thabari like Ibn Kathir, al-Zamakhshyari and al-Razi expanded the term *qawwam* to other aspects, such as mental and physical superiority of men over women, stating that men are more rational and stronger than women, who are considered weaker and more emotional (Dunn and Kellison, 2010). Al-Hibri (1982, p. 217) objected to this kind of interpretation and considered it as “unwarranted” because there is nothing in this verse to support these arguments.

The reformist Muslim scholars understand this verse differently. Wadud (1999) argues that Muslims should read this verse within its context (i.e. the first time it was revealed) and understood hermeneutically, according to the time when Muslims practised it. In understanding the term *qawwam*, Wadud (1999), alongside Al-Hibri (1982), argues that the men’s *qawwam* toward women can only

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11M. Pickthall’s translation (1930).
occur if two conditions are met, as stated in the verse above; namely, men have more means or more prominence than women do and second, men spend their wealth on supporting women. Wadud (1999), Al-Hibri (1982) and Abu Zayd (2000) conclude that these privileges and responsibilities are conditional and that this qawwam can be applied to both men and women in marriage as they are partners and their responsibilities are interdependent. For this reason, Abou El Fadl (2001a) argues that when both wife and husband contribute to the family income, they share the guardianship of each other.

Al-Thabari interpreted nushuz as a wife’s disobedience toward her husband, which may include refusing sexual intercourse. Reformist Muslims like Wadud (1999) reject this interpretation, because the term nushuz also applies to men as mentioned in Q. 4: 128. She argues that nushuz is better translated as “disruption of marital harmony” (Wadud, 1999, p. 74). In this case, three solutions are offered by the Qur’an: first, verbal advice; second, sleep in separate beds (a cooling down process); and third, and only in a severe case, severe punishment (daraba). In her later book, Inside the Gender Jihad (2006), Wadud argues that she can no longer tolerate a man striking a woman. Although the text says so, the Muslim community cannot tolerate any violence towards women because this is against the spirit of Qur’anic justice as a whole (Wadud, 2006).

Riffat Hassan (1990) argues that this verse (Q. 4: 34) should be understood as a functional relationship between men and women in the Muslim community to build harmony. If men support women materially then women should also fulfill their duties i.e. related to child bearing (Hassan, 1990). Barlas (2002) and Engineer (2005) also note that this verse obligates men to support women economically and this obligation does not at the same time appoint men as head of the family. In understanding the word daraba, Barlas (2002) suggests that it means symbolic action and the Qur’an uses it as restrictive rather than prescriptive, as daraba is considered as a last resort in dealing with marital disorder.
Sa’diyya Shaikh (2007, p. 70) takes a different approach in understanding this verse, which she called “tafsir through praxis”. This tafsir (interpretation), according to her, is based on the real experiences of ordinary women (in South Africa) dealing with their husbands’ violence, and relates to the texts and Islamic ethics. These women’s abusive experiences made them develop their own religious identity, defending them against such violence by arguing that God is just and does not tolerate any violence toward other human beings (Shaikh, 2007).

Chaudhry (Chaudhry, Muers, & Rashkover, 2009), however, has a different understanding of this verse (Q. 4: 34). According to her, God seems to give more preference to men and support the patriarchal system through text (Chaudhry et al., 2009). After reading this verse, Chaudhry (Chaudhry et al., 2009, p. 202) considers the Qur’anic text as “primarily patriarchal and without emancipatory potential for women reading the text today.” Her biggest fear is that no matter how hard Muslim reformists try to find alternative interpretations to avoid men’s absolute superiority over women, the dominant understanding of most Muslims who read this verse is literal, and in practice this verse will always be used to legitimate men’s violence in the name of religious doctrine (Chaudhry et al., 2009).

**Attempts to Reform Marriage Law in Muslim Societies**

Islamic revivalism, modernity and the rise of Islamic feminism have brought new perspectives on the discussion of Muslim family law in many Muslim countries. Demands for reform of the legal system have been made in countries like Egypt, Morocco and many others in the Middle East, as well as in Muslim societies in Asia. These reform attempts certainly invite heated debate among various political and ideological interest in the revised formulation of the law (Hallaq, 2009).
Several aspects of marriage were subject to reform, including registration and documentation of marriage, divorce and inheritance; prevention of child marriage that included punishment for those who practise it; the restriction of polygyny;\textsuperscript{16} and raising the age of marriage for girls and boys (Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2001; Welchman, 2007).

In Indonesia, issues surrounding marriage were the abiding concern of the women’s movement after Independence in 1945. Limited reforms were codified in the Indonesian Marriage Law No.1/1974 such as requiring the registration of marriage, reporting divorce to the court, setting the minimum marriage age to 16 years for girls and 19 for boys, and restricting polygyny. Further reforms have been proposed to amend the existing law to regulate marriage as a more equal relationship. This process was initiated in 2003 by LBH APIK (Institute for Legal Aid) and JKP3 (Jaringan Kerja Prolegnas Pro Perempuan, the National Working Network of Pro-Women Legislation).

In accordance with this attempt to amend the 1974 Marriage Law, a team lead by Musdah Mulia proposed several changes to the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) to establish a more egalitarian marital relationship. Considerations for change in the KHI include a minimum age of 19 for both men and women entering marriage, each party free to contract his or her own marriage (taking into account the Hanafi madzhhab, as described above), and many others (Mulia & Cammack, 2007). Unfortunately, this draft was ultimately withdrawn from consideration in 2005 due to objections from a large number of Islamist organisations (Mulia & Cammack, 2007).

Apart from reform attempts in Muslim countries, progressive Muslim scholars have also made efforts to criticise and re-examine existing laws and the interpretation of Islamic sources. Progressive Muslim scholars like Wadud, Barlas, Mernissi, Ali, Engineer, Abou El Fadl and many others raise awareness by

\textsuperscript{16}An exception is Tunisia, where polygyny is prohibited: it is said to be part of “a criminal infraction” because it is impossible for a man to do justice to more than one wife (Hallaq, 2009, p. 464).
applying new methods of interpretation of the Qur’an, and by paying attention to the context, the message of the Qur’an as a whole, and the ethics and justice of the Qur’an. With regards to the marital relationship, they refer to the Qur’anic spirit of mutuality in marriage, as in the following:

And among His signs is this, that he created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect. (Q. 30: 21)

Permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garments and ye are their garments. Allah knoweth what ye used to do secretly among yourselves; but He turned to you and forgave you; so now associate with them, and seek what Allah Hath ordained for you (Q. 2: 187, emphasis added).

From the above verses, marriage should be seen as a mutual contract between the couple and inferiority is not assigned to one or other of the parties (Goolam, 2006). These attempted reforms of legal systems and of Qur’anic understanding are promising steps towards more equitable marital relationships.

Sexuality in Islam

There are shared beliefs among Muslims in many Muslim countries concerning sexuality in Islam. These beliefs may include that Islam views sex positively, which means that it recognises sex as part of human nature (fitrah). However, sexual relations should only be conducted in married life. Sex outside the marital bond is considered zina. Heterosexual relations are the norm. Any sexual practices and identities outside this norm are considered deviant. Men’s sexual desire is privileged, while women’s sexual desire is feared. Islam also recognises the purpose of sex within marriage as not only for procreation but also for pleasure.

Today’s writings on sexuality in Islam challenge several beliefs considered to contradict human nature and neglect certain aspects of sexuality practised by Muslims around the globe. However, traditional attitudes toward sexuality in
Islam are still considered the standard and dominant beliefs among Muslims in many countries. Below, I review certain works on Islam and sexuality covering female sexuality in relation to the concept of fitnah, 'awra, virginity, female circumcision, family planning, contraception, abortion, rape, zina and some criticisms of traditional beliefs on sexuality.

**Female Sexuality in Muslim Society**

Addressing sexuality, especially female sexuality, is still considered taboo and dangerous in Muslim societies. In fact, according to Accad, the issue of female sexuality in developing countries is related to resisting male domination. Her research among Muslim women in Tunisia and Lebanon showed that “women experience so much pain in remembering past events in their lives connected with sexuality” (Accad, 2000, p. 40).

Research in other Muslim societies, like Iran, showed that women were responsible for maintaining purity through controlling their bodily movements and they knew little about how their body works. Most of the women learn what is socially acceptable and unacceptable through experience (Bauer, 1985).

Ilkkaracan (2000) and Moghissi (1999) both argue that the oppression of female sexuality in Muslim societies should not be seen as a result of misunderstanding of religious teachings as such, but other aspects should also be taken into consideration such as economic inequality and political interests. However, in many cases, religion is considered an effective tool for controlling female sexuality and verifying male domination in patriarchal society (Ilkkarachan, 2000).

Mernissi (1987, p. 32) argues that female sexuality in Muslim societies is seen in two contradictory categories which she called “explicit theory” and “implicit theory”. The first theory is the belief that women’s sexuality is passive while the man is active. By contrast, the second theory views women as having potent sexual desire, which is therefore dangerous (Mernissi, 1987). Both theories are
applied in Muslim communities: on one side the Muslim community regulates female sexuality by describing female sexuality as inferior to men’s sexuality, so women should be submissive in their sexual relations with their husband. But at the same time, the community fears female sexual potency and considers it dangerous and liable to cause social disorder (fitnah) (Mernissi, 1987, p. 32).

**The Concepts of Fitnah and ‘Awra**

*Fitnah* originally meant a trial from God, as stated in the Qur’an (Q. 21: 35). The term *fitnah* in the Qur’an has nothing to do with women nor is it associated with women as a source of disturbance of the faith.

Unfortunately, this term has deviated from its original meaning and when it is attributed to women, the meaning incorporates the sense that women are a source of social disorder. Women are then seen as a “sexually driven and lustful species and a potent source of disorder and hence need to be segregated so that men can be protected from temptation” (Hassan, 2008, p. 171). This expansion of the concept was derived from several traditions providing legal and normative justification. For example the report attributed to Ali, the fourth Caliph, stated that: “God created sexual desire in ten parts; then nine parts are given to women and one to men.”

Abou El Fadl (2001a) criticises this *fitnah* concept as invented by some Muslim jurists to protect men who have an overactive libido, and are impious and ill mannered, sacrificing women to be secluded and segregated. He calls for a faith-based protest against this “presumed *fitnah*” because it violates the higher moral values of justice and fairness promoted by the Qur’an.

The discussion of *fitnah* is often linked to the concept of ‘*awra* (Ind. *aurat*) in Islam although they are different issues. ‘*Awra* in the Arabic dictionary means “the pudendum of a human being that is abominable to uncover” (Lane, 1984, p. 2194). In *fiqh* discussions, ‘*awra* refers to the body parts that should be covered from public sight, because they are “considered private” (Abou El Fadl, 2001b, p.
354). Muslim jurists mention ‘awra in their discussion of what should be covered in prayer for men and women. The ‘awra of man is between his navel and his knee, and for woman is considered her entire body except her face and hands (Qaradlawi, 2001; Abou El Fadl, 2001a). In early Islamic discussion, the discussion of ‘awra was never associated with fitnah. Since then, the regulation of ‘awra in prayer for woman has become applicable outside prayer. In fact, the appropriateness of showing body parts is culturally diverse. Every society has different norms and behaviour in their dress code and perceptions of appropriateness.

In fact, in the Qur’an, both women and men, not just women, were instructed to lower their gaze, to control their own sexual desire (Q. 24: 30 – 31). Thus, women’s dress code and the prohibition of women from participating in public life is the result of an unreasonable view of women as a source of fitnah, which is based only on assumption (Hassan, 2008).

**Virginity**

Muslim societies highly value women’s virginity and require that all women should be virgins at their first marriage. By contrast, man’s virginity at first marriage is absent from the discussion. In fact, virginity for both sexes should be required because it is related to the discussion of zina: any sexual relation outside the marital bond is forbidden. Mernissi (1982) criticises the demand of virginity for women and she advises that if men respect virginity, then they too should refrain from having sexual contact before marriage.

Muslim patriarchal society never questions men’s sexual behaviour. Men’s sexual activity before marriage is never condemned as transgressive sexual behaviour. These points are excluded from discussions that demand women stay virgins until the wedding night.
Female Circumcision

The debate surrounding female circumcision, usually referred to as khitan or khifadl in Islam, or in recent discourse as female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/FGC), is about whether this practice is an Islamic or a cultural practice. In African Muslim countries, it is usually associated with cultural influence because it is also practiced among tribes that are not categorized as Islamic. In Egypt, female circumcision is practised by both Muslims and Coptic Christians (Berkey, 1996). In addition, some Muslim countries like Turkey and Iran do not practice female circumcision and in the Maghreb it is unknown (Bouhdiba, 1985).

Regardless of the debate, female circumcision is usually associated with Islam. In the Qur’an, in fact, there is no text supporting female circumcision. The proponents of female circumcision usually refer their argument to the Hadith under the authorisation of Abu Dawud that:

Circumcision is sunna (recommended) for men and makruma (noble act, honourable) for women. Another Hadith referred to the story of Umm Athiya (a woman who used to perform circumcision in Medina) the Prophet (peace be upon him) said to her: “Do not cut severely as that is better for a woman and more desirable for a husband.” (Dawud, n.d., Hadith no. 5251, Book 41)

Although these Hadith are considered weak, according to Abu Dawud himself, because they have a weak chain of transmission (Ali, 2006a; Berkey, 1996), they are still used as a reference for the practice of female circumcision. According to proponents of circumcision, this Hadith advises the practice of female circumcision with the condition that the cutting should not be excessive. Apparently, the practice of female circumcision in Muslim countries is used to control woman’s sexuality to reduce her sexual desire (Kister, 1994; Giladi, 1997; Berkey, 1996). This notion is also linked to the idea of fitnah: that woman has insatiable sexual desire and can cause social disorder.
In Indonesia, female circumcision is part of the rites of passage in some groups. The work of Feillard and Marcoes (1998) provides a comprehensive historical survey of the practice of circumcision in Indonesia, revealing how it first appeared in certain areas in 1670 and how it was practiced in secret as a part of the rite of entry into the Islamic community (Feillard & Marcoes, 1998, p. 338). Recent reports show regional variation in female circumcision across Indonesia. Newland (2006) observed that the practice of female circumcision in rural West Java is part of birthing rituals, a symbolic circumcision to position a child within the Islamic community that involves only scratching the prepuce with no actual cut, just to get rid of dirt (Newland, 2006). Research by Putranti (2008), however, showed that the actual cut exists in certain areas of Indonesia like Madura and Yogyakarta with the aim of becoming a ‘true’ Muslim (Putranti, 2008, p. 27).

Although at first this practice seems to be merely a way of incorporating children into the Muslim ummah in Indonesia, currently the practice appears to be more about controlling female sexuality than social identity (Haworth, 2012; Kompas, 2013). In addition, the ritual aspect has decreased because of the medicalisation of the operation, and the commercialisation of the practice: as a birthing package. In the process, female circumcision has become an obligation rather than a choice (Feillard & Marcoes, 1998; Newland, 2006; Putranti, 2008; Haworth, 2012; Kompas, 2013). This is misleading because there is no authoritative reference for this practice. Thus, this practice should be a choice, if not banned altogether, and it should be made public that there is no religious consequence if parents do not perform it. Beliefs surrounding the association of female circumcision with women’s sexual desire are part of patriarchal control over women’s sexuality in the name of religion.

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17 In 2010, the Ministry of Health together with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights issued a Regulation on female circumcision (sunat perempuan) no. 1636/MENKES/PER/XI/2010 that legitimate the practice of female circumcision under the authorisation of medical professionals.

18 Huzaimah [Yahido Tanggo], one of the board members of MUI (the Indonesian Council of Ulama), stated that female circumcision is a religious obligation and is to stabilise the sex drive (menstabilkan syahwat) (Kompas, 2013).
**Zina and Rape**

Zina is illicit sexual activity outside marriage. It is “consensual or voluntary sexual intercourse between men and women not married to each other” (Zuhaily 1985, p. 26). In Islam, zina is considered a crime that is subject to punishment (Q. 24: 2). Islam only permits sexual relationships within marriage. The Qur’an even mentions that Muslims should avoid acts that may lead to zina as stated in Q. 17:35 such as unmarried women and men going out together (unchaperoned), flirting, hand holding, embracing and kissing are forbidden in traditional Islam.

In many Muslim countries, however, the application of the zina ordinance overlaps with rape cases; there is a blurring of the distinction between the two terms (Zia, 2000; Sidameh, 2001; Imam, 2005). Rape is unlike zina. Rape, in Islamic law, is categorised as zina by force (zina bil ikrah) because it is perpetrated on the women without her consent, carried out by force and committed under threat (Al-Kasani, n.d). Rape is also discussed under hirabah (forcibly taking or highway robbery). Sayyid Sabiq (1997, p. 309 – 310, my emphasis) identified hirabah as a “single person or group of people causing public disruption, killing, forcibly taking property or money, attacking or raping women, killing cattle or disrupting agriculture.” Sabiq further notes that rape is a violent crime using sexual intercourse as a weapon, and one that has the worst impact on women of any crimes under hirabah (Sabiq, 1997). Muslim authorities dealing with rape cases under zina law fail to discuss zina within the context of hirabah or ikrah (duress). It is a mistake to correlate rape with zina because they are different matters.

**Family Planning and Contraception**

In classical Islamic law, most legal schools permit contraception to prevent pregnancy. Omran (1992) identified that eight out of nine Muslim jurists permit

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19 A relevant Hadith on this is narrated by Ibn Abbas: the Prophet said: “no man should stay with a lady in seclusion except in the presence of Dzu-Mahram.” (Bukhari, 1971, Hadith no. 4, vol. 7, p. 4) Dzu-Mahram means a woman’s relatives that are categorised as muhrim (someone that it is forbidden to marry).
contraception (p. 152). In the Qur’an there is no text discussing family planning specifically. The Muslim scholars derive their opinion of contraception from the Hadith of *azl* (coitus interruptus):

Narrated Ibn Jabir Ibn Abdullah, he said: “We [the Companions of the Prophet] used to practice *azl* [coitus interruptus] during the time of the Prophet while the Qur’an was being revealed.” (There is another version of the same Hadith by Muslim, “We used to practice *azl* [coitus interruptus] during the time of the Prophet. The Prophet came to know about it, but did not forbid us (doing that).” (Bukhari, 1971, Hadith no. 136, p. 102)

On the authority of Abu Hurairah, the Prophet said: “*azl* is not allowed without the consent of the wife.” (Authenticated by Abu Dawud) (Omran, 1992, p. 125).

These Hadith suggest that *azl* was a method used to prevent pregnancy in the early days of Islam and that the practice of *azl* requires the wife’s permission. The wife’s permission is important for two reasons that the wife has the right to experience sexual pleasure, and she has the right to offspring, if she so desires (Musallam, 1983; Omran, 1993, Shaikh, 2003b). It is important to remember these Hadith because they acknowledge that sexual activity in married life is shared and that decisions concerning family planning should be discussed between wife and husband (Shaikh, 2003). The majority of Muslim scholars of most legal schools agree that the permission of the wife is the condition to practice *azl* (Musallam, 1983, p. 31). Only Shafi’i scholars reject the condition that the wife’s permission is not needed for practising *azl*.

In Indonesia, there are intense debates about family planning between moderate Muslim organisations such as NU and Muhammadiyah and more conservative groups like PKS (Prosperous Justice Party) and HTI (Hizbut Tahrir of Indonesia). Moderate Islam supports family planning to improve quality of life in terms of the health, education and prosperity of the family. In contrast, conservative Islam groups state that family planning is forbidden and
they associate it with a Western conspiracy to limit Muslim population growth (Tim Yayasan Rumah Kita Bersama, 2013).

**Abortion in Islamic Law**

There are two main opinions concerning abortion in Islam: those jurists who prohibit abortion for any reason and jurists who allow abortion at certain stages of pregnancy, with a valid reason. Before presenting these two main juridical views, it is relevant to explain the development of the foetus according to Islam, because this topic is central to jurists’ arguments on abortion.

In the Qur’an, several verses discuss the creation of human beings. For example Q. 22: 5 states:

> O humankind! If ye have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust; then out of sperm (*nutfa*); then out of a leech-like clot (*’alaqa*); then out of a morsel of flesh (*mudgha*); partly formed and partly unformed.

Hadith also explain the development of human beings, as the Prophet said:

> Each of you is constituted in your mother’s womb for forty days as a *nutfa* (sperm), then it becomes an *’alaqa* (leech-like clot) for an equal period, then forms a *mudgha* (a morsel of flesh) for another equal period, then the angel is sent and he breathes the soul into it. (Muslim, 1955)

Referring to the verse and Hadith above, most of the jurists argue that abortion is prohibited after the angel breathes the soul into it. However, different Schools make different interpretations about which stage the angel breathes life into the soul (Musallam, 1983). The Hanafi jurists permit abortion until the end of the fourth month of pregnancy. They grant the pregnant woman the right to ask for abortion even without her husband’s permission but only for a valid reason (Musallam, 1983). The Shafi’i jurists’ opinions on abortion are divided into three groups: some jurists allow it before 120 days of pregnancy, some allow it until the fortieth day of pregnancy, and while the famous jurist, al-Ghazali, prohibited abortion at any time (Riyani, 2005; Anshor, 2006).
In the case of saving the mother’s life, Muslim jurists unanimously allowed abortion with the reason that a mother is the source, the origin of life, so her life and wellbeing is given priority. Several other medical conditions under which abortion is permissible, such as the risk of genetically transmitted diseases, evidence of a congenital defect, severe foetal abnormality incompatible with survival, and a breast-feeding mother whose baby is in need of her nutritious milk (Rispler-Chaim, 1993, p. 14-15).

**Some Criticisms of Traditional Islamic Sexuality**

There are some criticisms attributed to traditional Islamic views of sexuality, particularly on the issue of privileging male sexuality over female sexuality.

Sabbah (1984) for example criticised the orthodox discourse of sexuality that privileges men’s sexual desire over women’s sexual desire. Within this discourse, according to her, sexuality is “domesticized and hierarchized” (Sabbah, 1984, p. 98). Sexual activity is only permitted in the domestic arena and castrates women’s sexuality, forcing women to submissively wait on men’s demand for sexual satisfaction. Sabbah then argues that female sexuality is curtailed by the inscription “tattooed” on women’s body as silence, immobility and obedience (Sabbah, 1984, p. 5). She urges decoding of this message by calling for strikes against oppression and stupidity (Sabbah, 1984).

A similar criticism is offered by Moghissi (1999, p. 22). She notes that women’s sexuality has rarely found freedom of expression, because the main concerns of Islam are fear of women’s seductive capacity and sexual conduct. These fears have raised the issue of curbing women’s sexual potency and governing women’s moral conduct through surveillance by father, brother, family, the public and the state through the law (Moghissi, 1999, p. 20). Moghissi underscores Sabbah’s argument that orthodox Islam established the sexual hierarchy and identifies woman as a mere sexual object whose primary duty is to serve the husband’s sexual need (Moghissi, 1999).
The work of Ali (2006a) is significant in voicing and criticising the male bias and political struggles in regulating sexuality. Ali (2006a) argues that sexuality as described in the Qur’an is based on “mutual consent and reciprocal desires surrounding lawful sexuality” (p. xxv) but is now perverted by many Islamic jurists as based on a hierarchical relation between husband and wife in married life. She criticises the fiqh texts of marriage and sexuality under the term milk-ownership, dominion and control. Jurists view the marriage contract as “an exchange of lawful sexual access for dower, and continued sexual availability for support” (Ali, 2006a, p. 13).

Reviewing the literatures on marriage and sexuality in Islam, I found that the traditional Islamic law regulating marriage and sexuality is still the dominant influence in many Muslim countries, including Indonesia, but there have been many recent attempts to reform the law in contemporary Muslim countries. I certainly agree with most progressive Muslim thinkers who suggest marriage reform to accommodate egalitarian relationships between the sexes. In terms of sexuality research, it is time to open up the discussion of sexuality, to consider diverse practices among Muslim societies, and to ensure fairness for both sexes. A comprehensive and integrated approach to re-examining and reinterpreting religious texts is necessary to build new understandings of the subject matter, particularly in relation to married women’s sexuality.

In this general overview of the academic literature on marriage and sexuality in Indonesia and Islam, I have articulated several important conclusions. There has been increased research on sexuality in Indonesia; however, the focus has been mainly on adolescent sexuality and alternative sexualities. Women’s sexuality, in particular married women’s sexuality, is still given little attention. My thesis explores women’s sexual experiences in married life. Research on marriage and sexuality in Islam has been concentrated in Middle Eastern countries. Islam in Indonesia and in Southeast Asia in general, is usually overlooked in academic discussion (Hefner, 1997; Offenhauer, 2005). In fact, Southeast Asian Muslims comprise 80% of the world’s Muslim population (Offenhauer, 2005, p. 1). The
small amount of research related to women’s sexuality in Indonesian Islam means that this thesis is important in starting to fill the gap. This dissertation builds upon existing studies already conducted in Indonesia on women’s sexuality, particularly to investigate the sexual experiences of married women and to link these to the influence of Islam in shaping their practices.
Chapter Three
Methodology

This thesis employs a qualitative methodology. In qualitative research, the study encompasses not only “understanding, describing, explaining, unravelling, illuminating, chronicling, and documenting [the] social life” of others, but also the interaction of the self with the participants and the research context (Leavy, 2014, p. 1). Thus, this method accommodates and encourages the active engagement of the researcher with the entire process of the research. The qualitative methodology used in this thesis involves two main components: fieldwork and textual study. For fieldwork I use two data collection methods, namely, in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). In-depth and open-ended interviews are used to uncover “people’s views of reality” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 18) during fieldwork. Through interviews, the researcher has an opportunity to acquire “people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19), allowing research participants to express things in their own words, and to elaborate on those topics that are of most interest to them. During fieldwork, I was influenced by feminist ethnography, which builds close connections with the participants in a less hierarchical and exploitative manner (Oakley, 1981). This is particularly important in the process of researching a sensitive topic like sexuality.

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first section explains the fieldwork process and the second section explains the analysis of Islamic texts using an Islamic feminist hermeneutical approach.

Fieldwork

Situating Sexuality in Fieldwork

Sex research in anthropology is becoming more common and anthropologists have made significant contributions to the literature since the 1970s (Markowitz,
Writing a diary of fieldwork experiences is a common practice among anthropologists. Many researchers have addressed the issue of their own sexuality during fieldwork. For example, Blackwood (1995a) found it was impossible to reveal her sexual identity as a lesbian when conducting research in West Sumatra, Indonesia, where Islam and heterosexuality are central and powerful. In order to fit with local expectations, she concealed her sexual identity and portrayed herself as heterosexual with a fiancé. Similarly, Wolf (1996) pretended that she was a married woman to gain acceptance in the local community she was researching. However, this created a dilemma for the researchers when not telling the truth about their identity (causing some difficulty and distress) (Wolf, 1996; Blackwood, 1995a).

Wolf (1996) stated that for women, doing fieldwork could create certain challenges because of their gender. The local gender role will be applied to them so they will have to meet local expectations, especially in highly patriarchal societies (Wolf, 1996). Further challenges faced by women who conduct research on sexuality in different places include being asked on dates, being proposed to in order to get married, being asked to engage in sexual activity and being threatened with rape (Jones, 1999; Huseby-Darvas, 1999; Moreno, 1999; Warren & Hackney, 2000).

In Indonesia, many factors such as gender, marital status, ethnicity and class may influence data gathering during fieldwork (Warren & Hackney, 2000). This suggests that researchers will find different answers to research questions depending on whether the participant is male or female, single or married, insider or outsider, or high or low class. To gain local access and acceptance, researchers should employ certain strategies in Indonesia, especially if researching a sensitive topic like sexuality. For example, same sex interviewing is preferable in order to make participants comfortable in the process of exchanging
information and facilitating the discussions. Thus, mixed gender focus group discussions on sexuality are considered inappropriate (Hilber, Hull, Preston-Whyte, Bagnol, Smit, Wacharasin, & Widyantoro, 2010), and women should be accompanied by a male if they are interviewing a married man and vice versa. This accompanying male or female could be a male/female assistant but should preferably be a husband, father, wife, or mother. Murray (1999), who did research in Jakarta, stated that it was quite helpful for her (with her foreign appearance) to ask direct questions of her participants concerning their sexual lives. Further, she notes that the participants were more open to answering questions posed by someone who was not part of their community (e.g. a foreigner) than someone they already knew (Murray, 1999).

Being single is often an obstacle for female fieldworkers in Indonesia, as experienced by Blackwood and Wolf above. Newland’s experience (2006) of being accepted as a single female conducting research in West Java appears to be quite exceptional. Certain privileges are given to married women (and men) when they are conducting fieldwork accompanied by their spouse and their children. Children are usually a passport to a close relationship with participants (Beatty, 2009; Berninghausen & Kerstan, 1992).

The above-mentioned descriptions are the experiences of ‘outsider’ researchers in doing research on sexuality in Indonesia. During fieldwork, I also experienced certain issues when interviewing, especially around sexuality, which is often considered taboo. Nevertheless, as an insider researcher, I found interesting stories doing sexuality research in my own cultural context.

An Insider Researching Sexuality

In conventional anthropology, fieldwork has meant conducting research in a place that is far away from ‘home’, a place that is unusual and challenging. However, since the late twentieth century, many anthropologists have conducted fieldwork in their ‘home/own’ culture (Okely, 1996). There are different challenges and experiences in conducting research in an ‘other’ and one’s
‘home/own’ country. Scholars who conduct fieldwork in their ‘home/own’
country enjoy several advantages, such as basic understanding of the cultural
and social background, shared personal and emotional experiences, language
assurance, and accessibility (Dyck, 2000; Narayan, 1993). However, doing
fieldwork within my own cultural context, I had to be aware of possible
challenges. I did not have to experience being forced to wear the veil, as
experienced by Parker (2007), or convert to certain religious beliefs like Frisk
(2009), but participants could criticise me for engaging with Western theory and
ideas in analysing my/their own culture, as was shown in the cases of
Mapedzahama (2007) and Thapar-Bjorkert (1999). Similar complexities were
addressed by Narayan (1993) in applying Western theory to her own cultural
reality because there were differences in experiences, expectations and analysis.

Certain considerations should be taken into account in doing fieldwork in one’s
‘home/own’ realm, especially with the topic of sexuality. Many people in
Indonesia still consider sexuality a private matter, and feel uncomfortable and
fearful in discussing it. Personal sexual experience is a taboo subject for public
discussion. However, as mentioned before, especially with regards to popular
culture, there is much public discussion and concern about pre-marital and extra-
marital sexuality, sexual promiscuity and pornography. I believe that by
conducting private, in-depth interviews with married women, and by presenting
myself as an insider, I was able to conduct productive fieldwork.

The interview model I use in this research was inspired by feminist research,
especially Oakley’s article “Interviewing Women” (1981). Oakley suggests
interviewing in a less hierarchical and exploitative way, to engage in a two-way
communication process and to build a close relationship between the interviewer
and interviewee. An in-depth and open-ended interview with the participants is
considered “a strategy for documenting women’s own accounts of their lives”
(Oakley, 1981, p. 48) that would bring women’s experiences to the surface. The
feminist researcher should consider participants’ experiences as “new resources
for research” and for knowledge reference (Harding, 1987, p. 7).
Before I began fieldwork I was aware that conducting research on sexuality might be difficult: sensitive questions might affect participants’ responses, or they might even refuse to answer questions or feel uncomfortable. To reduce this possibility, I applied what King described as a “self-reflexive perspective” (1995, p. 26): the representation of my own gender identity within my own culture and society - where I was born and grew up - in concert with the critical (i.e. thoughtful and self-conscious) examination of this representation. The strategy of self-reflexivity worked well during my fieldwork where I engaged closely with my participants. Besides, in this research I positioned myself not only as researcher but also as a participant, as suggested by Roald (2004), in order to minimise the distance in the interpersonal exchange of experiences. Conducting research in my own culture meant I was part of the discussion on the topic being researched: I was both the researcher and the researched. Further, I expected that in these discussions I would put forward my own opinions in order to raise awareness of women’s sexual rights and deepen my understanding of my own cultural and religious construction in relation to women’s experiences (Okely, 1996).

In line with Warren & Hackney (2000) on factors that influence data gathering, in my experience there are three key factors: gender, marital status, and class. As a woman who had experienced the same gender socialisation as my research participants, it was easier to do interviews as a married woman, for whom it is more acceptable to discuss sex than it is for single women. Participants from lower social classes were quite open in their information about their marital sexual relationships compared to higher class women who tended to protect their image. Before beginning an interview, I always introduced myself as an academic who works in a higher educational institution near the field site. Many of my participants were familiar with this university. I was surprised that most of the women were willing to cooperate and disclose their marital sexual experiences, though several were reluctant to reveal their experiences.
There are three possible reasons the participants were so willing to disclose their marital sexual experiences with me. First, I situated the sexual conversations within the framework of marriage, of which sex is a part. Second, I started the interview with their marital history; asking them to remember when they first met their husband, which eased the topic into the conversation. Third, I assured them about the confidentiality of the research and I would protect their identity. Confidentiality was a common issue raised during the interviews. Many of the participants (about 70 percent) had never revealed their stories to anyone before me. I was honoured, but at the same time felt it a burden to tell their stories appropriately.

During the interviews, when questioning the participants about their sexual experiences, I was very conscious of the need to consider appropriateness. Giggling and/or covering of the mouth were common when the women were answering my questions about their sexual perceptions or practices. These expressions indicated to me that the women were shy (malu) in talking about their sexual thoughts or behaviours. A few of the women would simply reply to these questions by saying “something like that” (“nya kitu wae lah, neng”). On one occasion, a woman also asked me about my marital status, which suggested to me that she felt I was too forward in my discussion of sexual matters. When I said I was married, she looked satisfied. In Indonesia, discussion of sexual matters is not to be shared with unmarried women.

Several of the women cried in the middle of the interviews and their voices were trembling with emotion. For some women, participating in this study was a chance to pour out their feelings (curhat: curahan hati, lit. to overflow one’s heart) about their marital experiences. For others it was an opportunity to seek advice about marital problems. Some saw me as a marriage counselor. In some cases I could not avoid answering questions or giving advice in relation to their situation. However, when the problem was serious I referred them to professional help for further advice or advocacy. This experience contradicted the advice of Forsey (2013, p. 17), who states that a “research interview is NOT a
therapy session.” In my case, although I did not, of course, intend to provide therapy in the interviews, there was a therapeutic aspect to the interviewing process. After finishing the interview, many women expressed gratitude for the opportunity to address the issues related to their experiences and to me for listening to their stories. Many felt a heavy burden had been lifted when they shared their marital problems with me. I realised that it is important for women to have someone to listen to them regarding their wishes, hopes and expectations in marriage and their lives in general.

The Participants

Field research was conducted in Bandung, the capital city of West Java, from May 2012 to July 2012. I selected Bandung for two reasons: because there is a very limited amount of socio-cultural research that has been undertaken in this area, particularly on sexuality, and because it is my home town. Western scholars have mainly conducted research in Java (Central and East Java), Sumatra (Padang and Aceh), Bali, Lombok, and Sulawesi as mentioned in Chapter Two, but have ignored West Java.

I interviewed 42 primary participants, mainly Muslim married women and a number of their husbands. It was necessary to interview the husbands in order to understand both sides of the story in the marital relationship. The participants were selected from different educational and economic backgrounds in order that data would come from a range of different experiences and understandings. The participants’ educational backgrounds varied, from women who had never finished primary school to women who had a doctorate: never finished primary school (3), finished primary school (6), junior secondary school (2), and senior high school (16). Fifteen of the 16 women who had completed senior high school continued their study at university: diploma (2), undergraduate degree (4), Master’s degree (3), and Doctorate degree (4). Some women were newly married and some had long-term marriages, some had children and some did not. Five of the 42 women are divorced, four are widowed and one is separated from her
husband. The participants’ ages are between 18 and 59 years, and their occupations ranged from housewives (6), housekeeper (1), petty traders (5) to teachers (20) and lecturers (7).

Interviews were also carried out with officials from the KUA (Office of Religious Affairs), who provide pre-marital information sessions for prospective couples, and religious leaders. The latter were mostly leaders of Islamic boarding schools (*kyai*), who are regarded as having authority in choosing and interpreting the religious texts on sexuality to be taught to their students.

Along with interviews, group discussions can be a valuable instrument for encouraging participants to exchange views and share experiences on the topic being researched. Focus Group Discussions enable the researcher to observe/participate in dynamic interaction between the members of the group, and to identify how people perceive issues and justify their opinions to their peers (Berg, 2007; Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007).

Three focus group discussions (FGD) conducted during fieldwork. Ethical considerations of sexuality research in Indonesia suggest that it is inappropriate to conduct mixed-sex focus group discussions (Hilber et al., 2010). In my case, a mixed-sex FGD on sexuality was possible but with the condition that the participants were close friends and already familiar with one another marital stories. In this FGD, the discussion among participants was lively and engaged. In other group discussions, the women at first were too shy to start the discussion and had to be encouraged to speak. In my opinion, this silence was due to the lingering taboo on the discussion of sexuality in Indonesian society, such that many women are hesitant to speak openly. However, when one of them was brave enough to speak out, the other members would contribute (*menimpali*) and we were able to have an active discussion. Speaking in a humorous way is another strategy to decrease awkwardness when a woman has to refer to a ‘sexual organ’ or ‘sexual word/phrase’ when describing sexual intimacies, and this made the discussion more interesting.
Information about the research was given to all the participants and informed consent was obtained. This research follows the ethical guidelines approved by Human Research Ethics at the University of Western Australia under reference number RA/4/1/5114. All participants’ names are pseudonyms for reasons of confidentiality. Interviews and FGDs were carried out either in Sundanese or the Indonesian language. All interviews and discussions were audio recorded. Most of the participants were recruited through the researcher’s work friends’ connections at my home university. Some of them are students and colleagues, and the others are the women I met while observing majlis ta’lim. During the fieldwork, I met the primary participants twice: first to inform them about the research and ask whether they would participate, and second to interview them. A total of 74 participants were recruited for this study.

In terms of textual study, certain Islamic texts on sexuality, particularly those derived from, but not limited to, the Qur’an and Hadith, are analysed in this dissertation. The texts that are analysed are those mentioned by my participants during interviews. The analysis includes the content of those texts, the validity of information (especially for Hadith), and the interpretation of these texts in their socio-cultural and historical context. I use the hermeneutical approach to gain meaning textually and contextually and to find how texts influence the behaviour of the participants. In particular, this thesis employs an Islamic feminist hermeneutical approach to analyse the reading and interpretation of Islamic texts that privilege and sustain male power over female. I provide detailed discussion on Islamic feminisms and hermeneutical approaches to the Islamic texts below.

Textual Study: Islamic Feminisms and The Hermeneutical Approach to Islamic Texts

Islamic Feminisms

Feminism and religion are two contested terms in the study of both fields. Feminism has accused religion of contributing to inequality between man and woman through its teachings; while religious studies has long been dominated
by male scholars with an “androcentric presupposition” and has ignored gender and feminist theory in its analysis (King, 1995, p. 2; Gross, 1996).

In non-Western, developing and Islamic countries and societies, there is a heightened resistance to using the term ‘feminism.’ Not only is the term associated with the West but also it is linked to a colonial ideology (Donaldson & Kwok Pui-Lan, 2002; Jayawardena, 1986). Feminists in developing countries often criticise the assumption of Western feminism that it is universally applicable – that is, they analyse the lack of cross-cultural analysis, and argue that Western feminism fails to consider specific socio-economic and cultural contexts (Mohanty, 1991). Islamic feminists like Shaikh and Wadud (Shaikh, 2003a; Wadud, 2008) make similar criticisms.

In many Muslim countries, as Kandiyoti (1991, p. 7) notes, any attempt to associate with feminism leads to accusations of “betrayal” of one’s own cultural authenticity. Nevertheless, although the term feminism is rejected, “this does not mean that a feminist consciousness and agenda are absent” in Islamic countries (Karam, 1998, p. 6). Muslim women’s movements began questioning inequality between men and women in many Muslim countries in the 1990s. These movements gained inspiration from the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) internationally, including among Muslim countries, and the expansion of the international women’s movement (Mir-Hosseini, 2011). Several women’s movements adopted the term feminism with the aim of liberating women from various oppressions they experienced in everyday life. In this way, Islamic feminism has become an integral part of the global contemporary Islamic movement in many Muslim countries (Mahmood, 2001).

The book *Feminism and Islam* (1996) by Mai Yamani articulates the resistance of Muslims to a Western model of feminism in Islamic contexts. This book accommodates diverse attempts to fight for gender equality derived from different Muslim countries in the Middle East (Yamani, 1996).
Margot Badran’s work on Islamic feminism has made a valuable contribution to the discussion. She has consistently developed and articulated the history, definition and goals of Islamic feminism (particularly in Egypt), and how they are distinct from those of Western feminism (1989, 1995, 2002a, 2002b, 2005, 2011). Badran (2002a) argues that although the term feminism originated in the West, it is not Western. She states that “feminisms are produced in particular places and are articulated in local terms” (Badran, 2002a, p.1). Although she differentiates between secular and Islamic feminism (2005), she recognises that there has been a mutual relationship between the two in their goal to achieve equality and justice for women. Similarly, Mir-Hosseini (2011, p. 76) “calls for a reconciliation and transcendence of the distinction” between secular and Islamic feminism to achieve the same goal.

Other work on Islamic feminism is addressed by Cooke (2001, 2002). Cooke’s work is useful because of her concept of “multiple critique”. “Multiple critique” refers to women who “criticize the various individuals, institutions, and systems that limit and oppress them while making sure that they are not caught in their own rhetoric” (2002, p. 151). Like Badran, Cooke (2002) emphasises that feminism does not belong to only one culture: it belongs wherever it seeks gender justice. Cooke (2001) suggests that feminism is not only an ideology but also a tool for analysing the ideas and forces that lead to unjust gender relations in society.

There has been heated discussion on this topic in Iran (Moghadam, 2002; Ahmadi, 2006). Certain Muslim scholars like Moghissi (1999) and Afkhami (in Moghadam, 2002) criticise the phrase ‘Islamic feminism’ as incompatible with Islam. Moghissi claims that the term ‘Islamic feminism’ is a contradiction: in her opinion, Islam is essentially patriarchal and does not support the agenda and goal of feminism. Thus, putting feminism within the framework of Islam or something similar is absurd (1999). Mir-Hosseini (2011) argues that although there has been heated debate on the term, Islamic feminism can be used without hesitation. Mir-Hosseini (2011, p. 68) further indicates that “Islamic” in this phrase means “finding inspiration and even legitimacy in Islamic history and
textual sources.” She challenges those who argue that it is impossible to be a feminist and at the same time have a strong faith (Mir-Hosseini, 2011).

In this study I will use the term ‘Islamic feminisms’ for two reasons. First, Muslim scholars who fight for gender equality in Muslim societies derive their concepts from, and base their beliefs in, Islamic teachings, so the term ‘Islamic’ is appropriate. Second, there is no need to avoid using the word feminism in conjunction with the word Islamic because feminism does not necessarily refer to ideology but to an activity that highlights gender equality. However, in application, it is important to use it with care and sensitivity. For example, in implementing the idea of feminism one should adapt to the local cultural scene to be accepted. Many scholars in this field still avoid being labelled feminist in order to minimise prejudice. Zainah Anwar (2009), one of the founding members of Sisters in Islam (SIS) of Malaysia, takes this advice and identifies herself as a Muslim feminist because she says there is a human agency in understanding of God’s message by using the word Muslim rather than Islamic. In Indonesia, several women activists also identified as Muslim feminists rather than Islamic feminists (Van Doorn-Harder, 2006; Qibtiyah, 2012).

Some scholars self-identify as feminist (e.g. Hassan calls herself a feminist theologian) (Hassan, 2001), while others are still reluctant to call themselves feminist. Amina Wadud (2006) refuses to call herself a feminist, even though she admits that she is doing feminist work and using a feminist methodology. She emphasises “pro-faith and pro-feminist” perspectives that are based on the Qur’an as a transcendent and ultimate reality (Wadud, 2008, p. 436). Badran (1995) classifies these Muslim women as feminists not because of their self-identifications but because of their ideas, agendas and actions. Thus, they can be called what Parker (2007) identifies as “faith-based feminist[s]”, as they operate within the Islamic perspective.

There is a growing body of literature on the theory and methodology of Islamic feminism as well as a growing number of scholars who are devoted to
developing this formulation in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt and Iran. Indonesian Islam, and in particular Indonesian Islamic feminism, is often overlooked in the Islamic world, despite it having the most populous Muslim population in the world (Hefner, 1997; Offenhauer, 2005; Parker, 2007). In Indonesia, the discussion of feminism is perhaps not as vigorous as in the Middle East, but there is no doubt that an Indonesian feminism has evolved.

The word feminism is an imported Western term, but Indonesian feminism should not be regarded as similar to Western feminism (Robinson, 2009). The term feminism in the Indonesian context denotes a non-indigenous concept and is often considered irrelevant to Indonesia (Sadli, 2002). It is often considered a Western conspiracy and even associated with Zionism, as an attempt to destroy Islam. More moderate opponents consider it contrary to Islamic teachings and local culture (Muttaqin, 2008). Particular objections emerge on issues like preferred sexual orientation and abortion. There are differences in terms of its history, concepts and struggles. Blackburn (2004) also notices that the different understanding of the word feminism in Indonesia has a connection with Indonesian nationalism, Islam and the New Order ideology, though the latter is receding nowadays. However, Sadli (2002) still hesitates to call it Indonesian feminism as she argues that an Indonesian theory of feminism has not yet been well established. Indonesian feminism has its own significance, since early Indonesian history was “built on the empowering aspects of indigenous models of femininity: the acknowledged important role of women in household economies and cultural traditions that did not prevent women from assuming public office” (Robinson, 2009, p. 65).

Two categories of feminism exist in Indonesia, namely secular and Islamic feminism. The secular feminists, mostly from the middle-upper class, opened up the road to adopting feminism in Indonesia upon their return from study abroad in the 1980s (Robinson, 2009; Nurmila, 2011, p. 36). The secular feminist, although they are Muslim, do not base their feminist activities in Islamic sources (Nurmila, 2011). Nor are they familiar with Islamic teachings, as they were educated in
secular education institutions rather than Islamic ones (Nurmila, 2011). On the other hand, Islamic feminists derive their support for their actions from Islamic sources (Qur’an and Hadith) (Van Doorn-Harder, 2006). They are familiar with Islamic teachings as most of them have been educated in a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) or a State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) (Nurmila, 2011; Feillard & Van Doorn-Harder, 2013).

Islamic feminism in Indonesia is indebted to work by Islamic feminists in the Middle East and North America, particularly by Mernissi, Hassan and Wadud. Intensive discussions concerning women, gender and Islam began in the 1990s (Van Doorn-Harder 2006; Robinson 2006; Syamsiyatun, 2008; Nurmila, 2011). Robinson (2006, 2009) mentions that in the 1990s many Indonesian Islamic scholars began to refer to the works of the international Islamic feminists mentioned above to support their cause. However, Nurmila (2011, p. 54) points out that Indonesian Islamic feminists are not simply replicating those works “but instead synthesizing their works and producing something new.” A note should be made here that not all issues discussed by international Muslim feminists are relevant to the Indonesian context. Issues such as honour killings discussed by Hassan are not experienced by Indonesian Muslims. Issues hotly debated among Islamic feminists in Indonesia are related to polygyny and the implementation of sharia-based law, which in most cases is discriminating for women (Feillard & Van Doorn-Harder, 2013).

Van Doorn-Harder (2006) states that Islamic feminism in Indonesia is forming its own unique Islamic feminism which differs from that in other Muslim countries in the Middle East as well as its neighbour, Malaysia. Indonesian Islamic feminists contribute greatly to what Hidayah (2012, p. 191) describes as “Indonesianising Islamic feminism” in order to suit the needs of Indonesian Muslim women, and “feminising Indonesian Islam” using religious texts to challenge patriarchal interpretations. Feminism in the Indonesian context is defined by Van Doorn-Harder (2006) as an effort “to improve the condition of women and men of all classes, strive for equality between sexes and classes, and
engage in Islamic discourse with the goal of empowering women, men and the suppressed” (p. 37).

Islamic feminists employ hermeneutical approaches in their understanding of Islamic sources to provide a comprehensive understanding that supports gender equality and to counter a literalist understanding of Islamic texts that marginalises women’s position in Islam. The following section explains further about hermeneutical approaches to Islamic texts that are used by Islamic feminists.

The Hermeneutical Approach to Islamic Texts

Modern society raises many questions that are not answered directly in the Qur’an. In order to guide modern Muslim society, some Muslim scholars have proposed a new perspective in interpreting the Qur’an: a hermeneutical approach. This approach is an attempt to reinterpret the Qur’an in order to respond to contemporary social and political conditions. Muslim scholars like Rahman (1982), Abu Zayd (1993, 2010) and Arkoun (2006), to name a few who initiated the hermeneutical approach to the Qur’an, emphasise the importance of context in interpreting the Qur’an.

Most Muslims agree that the Qur’an is God’s word. However, since the Qur’an is addressed to human beings and was revealed to the Prophet (who was a human being), it had to be delivered in a human language in order for its message to be understood properly. The Qur’an uses Arabic because Muhammad lived in Arabia. It was revealed section by section to respond to the needs of the community being addressed at that time. The chosen language (Arabic), the trusted person (Muhammad) and the specific region (Arabia) where the revelation took place constitute the context of revelation.

The hermeneutical approach emphasises not only the textual meaning of the Qur’an but also its socio-historical context that includes the society and culture: the attitudes, norms and values of the Hijaz and Arabia (Saeed, 2006) where the
text emerged. Secondly, it emphasises the unity concept of the Qur’an; thirdly, the importance of the ethical dimension of the Qur’anic message; and fourthly, the application of rational *ijtihad* (interpretation) which is opposed to *taqlid* (blind imitation).

One of the famous hermeneutical approaches is that proposed by Rahman (1982) for his theory of “double movement”:

> In building any genuine and viable Islamic set of laws and institutions, there has to be a twofold movement: First one must move from the concrete case treatments of the Qur’an - taking the necessary and relevant social conditions of that time into account - to the general principles upon which the entire teaching converges. Second, from this general level there must be a movement back to specific legislation, taking into account the necessary and relevant social conditions now obtaining. (Rahman, 1982, p. 20)

Similarly, Abu Zayd (2010) proposes an interpretation of the Qur’an which focuses on the dialectical interaction between the text and reality. According to him, the historical context of the revelation is important in distinguishing between *ma’na* (historical meaning) and *maghza* (significance). *Ma’na* is taken from the context of revelation which is fixed; while *maghza* is the meaning derived in accordance with the present socio-cultural context, which is changeable (Abu Zayd, 1993).

Arkoun is another sophisticated Muslim intellectual who contributed to the critical thinking of not only the Qur’an but also Islam in general. In terms of Qur’anic studies, Arkoun (2006) suggests evaluating not only the content of the Qur’anic interpretation but also the theoretical approaches with regard to Islamic context and religious traditions. Arkoun’s project of interpretation treats the Qur’an as discourse, not as a sacred written document (*mushaf*) or, to use his term, an “official closed corpus” (Arkoun, 1997).

The hermeneutic approach is extended by Islamic feminists to demonstrate that the Qur’an is compatible with modernity and supports gender equality. Islamic
feminists began studying women in Islam in the late twentieth century, especially in the 1990s (Badran 2002a). They began to form a new paradigm in interpreting the Qur’an from a gender-sensitive perspective. Muslim women scholars like Riffat Hassan (1994), Amina Wadud (1999) and Asma Barlas (2002) share a methodology in their critical examination of religious texts: it is a hermeneutical model. Following the male scholars above, the Islamic feminists’ hermeneutical approach emphasises the need to reread and reinterpret the Qur’an and challenge the patriarchal interpretation of the Qur’an within an egalitarian and anti-patriarchal epistemology (Barlas, 2002, 2006; Wadud 1999, 2006).

Amina Wadud’s method of reading the Qur’an is called the hermeneutics of tawhid (1999, p. xii). She explains further as follows:

I propose a hermeneutics of tawhid to emphasize how the unity of the Qur’an permeates all its parts. Rather than simply applying meanings to one verse at a time, with occasional references to various verses elsewhere, a framework may be developed that includes a systematic rationale for making correlations and sufficiently exemplifies the full impact of Qur’anic coherence. (Wadud, 1999, p. xii)

The concept of tawhid as conceived by Wadud is different from how most Muslims understand it. Most Muslims understand tawhid not as the unity of the Qur’an but as the theological concept of God as the one and only God (monotheism). The concept of the unity of the Qur’an is called wahdah mawdhu’iyyah li al-Qur’an. Later, in her article “Engaging Tawhid in Islam and Feminisms” (2008, p. 436) she clarified her “tawhidic paradigm” as the expansion of Islamic monotheism which means “God is one, God is unique, God is united and God unites all things”. Inherent in this meaning, she explains, is “the basis for non-discrimination and a challenge to patriarchy in Islamic worldviews” (Wadud, 2008, p. 437).

Conservative interpretations tend to sustain hegemonic knowledge construction in the name of shaping the tradition and the methodology that sustains the patriarchal reading of the texts. Wadud (2006, p. 206) emphasises that her
method is to try to challenge “the inherent sexist biases of the historicity of words”. She said that the Qur’an was revealed in the specific socio-historical context of patriarchal Arabia of the seventh century. These socio-historical contexts affect meaning construction through cultural and linguistic construction.

Asma Barlas (2002) is another scholar who employs hermeneutics in Qur’anic interpretation. Like Wadud, she begins her hermeneutical reading of the Qur’an by discussing the idea of tawhid (the Oneness of God) as the basis for an anti-patriarchal reading. Barlas (2002, p. 13) starts her method by exposing God’s self-disclosure, which consists of three principles: “divine unity, justness and incomparability.” By divine unity (tawhid), she demonstrates the “indivisibility of God’s Sovereignty to challenge the theory which assumes male as an extension of God’s rule.” By justness, she reveals the term zulm (doing harm to others by transgressing their rights) in the Qur’an, which clarifies that God never does any zulm to anybody. From analysing this term she derived divine justice as “respect for the rights of the human as a moral agent” (Barlas, 2002, p. 14). And God’s “incomparability” means that God is absent of anthropomorphic terms; this rejects the attribution of God as male, as represented in the Arabic-gendered language used in the Qur’an, because, as she argues, “God is beyond sex/gender” (p. 21). Barlas (2002) challenges the patriarchal reading of the Qur’an and exposes the egalitarian voices of the Qur’anic text, which she claims, “have been submerged or lost because of the patriarchal nature of its exegesis and the gendered nature of human language” (p. 22).

When reading the text to derive its intrinsic meaning, Barlas suggests to also read behind the text to reconstruct the historical context surrounding the revelation or the text production and to read in front of the text to re-contextualise the text in the present context (Barlas, 2002, p. 21). By applying this method, Barlas (2002, p. 25) arrived at the conclusion that the Qur’an is an egalitarian text that established the principle of the equality of the sexes.
In Indonesia, the discourse of the hermeneutical approach to the Qur’an has attracted favourable attention from modern scholars like Nurcholish Madjid (1996), Nassaruddin Umar (1999), Amal and Panggabean (2005), and several Islamic feminists like Lies Marcoes-Natsir (Sciortino, Marcoes-Natsir, & Mas’udi, 1996), and Musdah Mulia (2005).

Nurcholish Madjid’s work on Qur’anic interpretation was influenced by Fazlur Rahman, his supervisor at the University of Chicago (Johns & Saeed, 2004). Like Rahman, Madjid argues that it is important to examine the historical context of the revelation in order to bring to discussion the universal and normative message of Islam and apply it to contemporary realities (Madjid, 1996, 2005).

Nasaruddin Umar (1999) analyses the Qur’an by giving attention to semantics, semiotics, hermeneutics, and knowledge of asbab al-nuzul (specific context following the revelation). He criticised various forms of gender bias in Qur’anic interpretation including the gender bias of male interpreters, of the Arabic language, Arabic grammar, and also in fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) (Umar, 1999).

Marcoes-Natsier is a leading Islamic feminist in Indonesia and through the non-government organisation, P3M, she has promoted the critical study of religious texts: the Qur’an, the Hadith and classical texts. Principally, P3M focuses on interpreting the Qur’an in relation to reproductive rights. It aims to promote equality of women and men based on Qur’anic verses and rejects women’s subordination to men, as a precondition for respect of reproductive rights (Sciortino et al., 1996).

Employing a feminist framework and the hermeneutic approach for the research in this thesis is important as both of these perspectives use critical examination to open the discourse of equity and social justice. The feminist perspective enables us to highlight women’s experiences and to consider their experiences as knowledge (Harding, 1987). It also allows us to analyse the power relations that influence the social organisation of sexuality that privileges male sexuality and ignores female sexuality. The hermeneutical approach interrogates the
domination of knowledge production and distribution by certain authoritative religious powers and enhances the opportunities for other voices to contribute to knowledge production.
Chapter Four
Women’s Perceptions and Expectations of Marriage and Sexual Relations

This chapter explores the perceptions and expectations of women about marriage and sexual relations in West Java. Understanding women’s perceptions and expectations of marriage and sexual relations in West Java should be situated within the framework of an active relation between imposed state gender ideology in Indonesia and other authoritative texts and local traditions, including religious texts and traditions. The gender ideology deployed during the Suharto era (1966 - 1998) influenced the construction of women’s subjectivity. Islam, through its teaching, has strengthened the state gender ideology and contributed to the construction of women’s subjectivity.

Most women I interviewed were aware that marriage brings happiness as well as unhappiness. They were made aware of this through the marriages of their parents, neighbours and friends. Marriage was an important life stage for these women. As in many other regions in Indonesia, marriage in West Java establishes a person’s place in social life as an adult and a full member of society (Wessing, 1978; Grijns, 1987). However, research by Horikoshi (1976) mentioned that marriage did not necessarily grant a woman full adulthood until she delivered a baby. Horikoshi’s finding confirmed Strathern’s (1993, p. 42) observation that a woman gains “less-than-full social status” compared to a man even after she has performed certain rites (like puberty or marriage rites), because she is seen in terms of her biological function rather than her social function. In the Sundanese community described by Horikoshi (1976), a woman is seen to gain full adulthood through fertility and she is considered an “incomplete” human being until and unless she marries and bears a child (Strathern, 1993, p. 42).

This “incomplete” woman’s social status is strengthened by both cultural and religious gender stereotypes. For example in the Sundanese community it is said
that “awewe mah dulang ti nande” (women are like a big rice bowl waiting to be filled), which means that a woman has to wait and follow her husband. Another saying, “awewe mah pondok lengkah” (women’s footsteps are short), meaning that women’s movements are limited, influences the sexual and labour division in the family and society, limiting women’s participation in the public sphere. An ideal Sundanese wife is expected to stay in the house waiting for her husband to return from work and expected not to go outside (to work or visit relatives/friends) except with permission from her husband.

The participants in my study wished to get married at least once in their lifetime. Accordingly, they would prepare for their marriage carefully. As I observed during the interview, women with higher levels of education considered it important to know their partner’s character, family background and friends prior to getting married, in order to avoid a miscast marriage and to minimise marital conflict. In contrast, women with lower educational backgrounds did not consider such factors much. In general, partners from similar cultural backgrounds were preferred in order that they could easily adapt to each other.

The idea that a man was the head of the household and the breadwinner was deeply embedded in these women’s minds when they came to select a partner for marriage. Many women perceived that for them, marriage is about serving their husbands, reproduction and obedience. Regardless of their educational background, most women agreed that it is a wife’s duty to serve her husband, including in sexual relations. They perceived this submissive sexual relation as a naturally conceived duty in the marital relationship. This perception of an hierarchical relation in married life was strong, and is supported by the state law (the 1974 Indonesian Marriage Law) and written in religious texts (the Qur’an, Hadith and fiqh).

Listening to women’s voices and recognising their experiences about their daily lives, I realised that in practice women have various strategies to meet the expected roles and duties in marriage in their own ways. This chapter
demonstrates how these women perceive and react to the reality they experienced; how they interact with other members of society and how they negotiate certain conditions to form their own consciousness in the established social, cultural and religious expectations directed at them.

**Marriage as Social, Cultural and Religious Obligation**

Being the only single person aged 24 in the village at the time, I had to deal with so many fingers pointing at me. They [the neighbours] said that I was too picky, demanding only a man with a university degree for a husband - and there was not even one available in the village. In fact, I had simply not found the right one. (Ida, aged 36)

Marriage is an ideal norm in Indonesian society in general. In West Java, the prestige associated with marriage is also directed toward the parents of the married couple. In Sundanese culture, marriage of one’s children is considered a parental responsibility (Suhamihardja, 1984; Muchtar & Umbara, 1977). Consequently, parental blessing is an important aspect of marriage. Previously, underage (teen) marriage was common in West Java (Jones et al., 1994; Jones 2001). Nowadays, according to Jones and Gubhaju (2011), West Java is no longer the province with the earliest marriage age. However, the practice of early marriage has not disappeared altogether; many still practise it, especially in rural areas (Iswarini, 2011; Jones, 2011). This practice in several areas in West Java like in Cirebon, Sukabumi & Bogor as reported in monograph series by Yayasan Rumah Kita Bersama is associated to traditions, misinterpretation of Islamic texts and economic pressures (Syatibi, 2016; Agustinah, 2016; Ali, 2016). In Sunda, parents feel secure when they marry off their daughter early: it means that their daughter was marriageable (*laku*). Parents acknowledged that it was more difficult with daughters than sons when it came to monitoring their sexuality. The parents’ biggest fear is that their daughters may engage in illicit sex or be raped, which will damage their reputation. In reality though, rape is not a common threat in daily life. Contrary to this perceived threat, Sano reports (2012)
that many teenage girls in Indramayu, in the coastal area of West Java, were forced by their parents to enter sex work in order to contribute to the household economic income, even to the extent of sacrificing their education (Sano, 2012).

Women experience greater pressure to marry than men do. Gendered double standards require women to remain virgins and stay away from sexual encounters before marriage. Failure to demonstrate modesty and virginity will attribute them with less value as a prospective wife and mother. Research in another region in Indonesia showed that preserving a good sexual reputation was important for women in Lombok before marriage (Bennett, 2005a). This also applies elsewhere in Indonesia. Marriage also signifies the recognition of women’s role in society and the nation, identified according to the binary opposition of man/woman: public/domestic. The labelling of women as jomlo (without partner) or perawan tua (old maid) can cause embarrassment not only to the woman herself but also to her whole family. Similar standards do not apply to men.

Three factors influenced the decision to get married among my participants: parental and community pressure, age, and living in non-parental guardianship. The primary reason was parental and community pressure for marriage. Most parents who demanded their daughter get married were seen as responding to community pressure, wherein neighbours and villagers would keep asking parents when their daughter was going to get married. The social convention that says that women must marry is quite strong in West Java. A single woman was the target of gossip and sometimes mockery around the neighbourhood. The quotation at the beginning of this section is one example indicating this pressure.

Another factor for getting married was age. Although many Indonesian women nowadays marry at a later age, in some cases, when they are over 30, many women panic and are likely to consider any already existing candidates for marriage. In several circumstances, the women had to forget about romantic love or getting to know their partner’s personality prior to getting married. In fact,
this decision meant that women risked unpleasant treatment or marital abuse from their husbands. This was experienced by Sofi (aged 39) who was forced to marry by her parents because she was 34 at that time. When her uncle introduced her to a man, Sofi agreed, although she was unsure about marrying someone unfamiliar. Sofi experienced abusive treatment from her husband during the short duration of her marriage.

The third reason for women marrying was to remove themselves from living arrangements under non-parental guardianship. When parents divorce and enter into another marriage they sometimes leave their children to be taken care of by relatives or grandparents. Several women I interviewed who lived in such situations felt uncomfortable and decided to leave as soon as possible. Getting married is one way they can do this. This was the experience of Rani (aged 40) who lived with her sister after her parents’ divorce and had no other choice but to accept the first man who proposed to her. She said that:

If it were not for the fact that I did not want to burden my sister any more, I would not have accepted my husband’s proposal to marry. I was not ready to get married, I was not even thinking about it. Besides, I still wanted to choose a partner who had a better job and was rich.

Marriage is also seen as a religious requirement. In Islam, it is considered part of sunnah, practiced by the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims are encouraged to get married as marriage is also perceived as ibadah (part of worshiping God).

Recent studies of marriage in Indonesia indicate that there are changes in attitudes toward marriage (Jones, 1994, 2011). Delayed marriage and self-arranged marriage have become trends among women, especially in urban areas (Situmorang, 2011). Increased opportunities in education and paid work for women have strongly influenced this attitude (Jones, 1994).

Social attitudes toward marriage, then, are expected to change following the change in marriage patterns. Women should be given the opportunity to decide what is best for themselves: when, whom and how to marry, or whether to marry or not. Rampage (2002) suggests that it is time for the institution of marriage to
adapt to this new pattern of marriage and this would include changes to the marriage law, as discussed above.

Women’s Dreams, Expectations and the Reality of Marriage and Sex

For most women that I interviewed, an ideal marriage partner was a man with a good physical appearance (berbadan tegap), who is handsome (ganteng) and wealthy (kaya). In reality, however, many of these women could not meet these criteria. In many cases, they had limited choice on who they should marry. Parental and social pressure for marriage, age and non-parental living arrangements as explained above push them to marry the first available candidate, without having much time for further consideration.

After marriage, women changed their criteria for their expressed ideal marriage partners. For example, Maya (aged 41), after she was married, said:

An ideal marriage partner - it’s not only about his physical appearance, which I used to dream of, but the most important thing is a mutual understanding of each other’s limitations and weaknesses.

Rani (aged 40) also said:

Before, my ideal marriage partner was someone who was handsome and wealthy. Nowadays, being good-looking is not what matters, but providing rice every day to survive.

One interviewee, though, described her ideal marriage partner quite differently. Brought up in a devoted religious family who owned a pesantren, Hera (aged 28) wished to be married just like the daughters of her relatives, whose husbands were chosen by parents and without courtship. She felt that she had been rebellious because she had not followed these processes. She told me that, “I wished my husband was a santri (student in pesantren), with good religious knowledge. But he [the husband] is not.” Later in their marriage, Hera’s husband became keen to improve his religious knowledge.
After marrying, several women also gave up their jobs, especially when the first baby arrived. Many of the couples did not delay in having children. The wife would get pregnant two or three months after the wedding. This pregnancy was also seen as proof of woman’s reproductive capability.

Several women did have expectations of their partners within marriage. They set criteria and shared those with their partners before and within marriage. Some women expected that their partners comprehend and appreciate both parties’ interests throughout the marriage. Mia (aged 25), for example, was keen to know whether her partner would support her either to work or to pursue further studies after they married. It was a difficult process to convince her partner before marrying. However, Mia continued her negotiations until they finally reached an agreement.

Other women expected their future husband would have a great sense of responsibility and independence. They anticipated that within marriage, the husband would become the leader of the family. Consequently, it was important to marry a man who had those characteristics and was not dependent on his parents. Leli (aged 29) decided to end her engagement with her fiancé because of his dependency on his mother when making decisions. Leli predicted that the parent would likely interfere with their marital affairs. Relationships with in-laws are important in West Java, especially for women, who will be monitored concerning their habits and behaviour. Mala (aged 40), for example, has been questioned by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law because she allocates housework to her husband, and her mother-in-law is not pleased that her son does housework.

Women from low educational and economic backgrounds usually did not place too many expectations on their marriage partner. Economics was one reason for getting married. Anah (aged 30) told me that she experienced better economic conditions after marriage:
Before marriage, if I wanted to buy something like clothing or shoes I could not afford to buy these things. I did not dare to ask my parents as they were having difficulty in providing our daily expenses. After marriage, my husband provided what I need.

Nowadays, with more opportunities for women in education and paid work, women’s expectations of marriage and their partners have also gone up. As women participate more in paid work, they tend to expect their husbands to be more involved with housework and childrearing. However, in practice this is not easy to manage, because in marriage women are perceived to be primarily responsible for the domestic domain. Intensive communication is essential to make equal marriage arrangements possible. Some women also teach their husband to do housework such as sweeping the floor, washing the dishes and taking care of the baby. Mala (aged 38) said:

I hated to see my husband sit and watch TV while there were dirty dishes waiting to be washed. And I was too tired to do all that stuff after working all day. I began to talk to my husband about household division of labour.

At first, her husband refused to participate, but after Mala told him she really needed help with all the housework, her husband grudgingly agreed (terpaksa).

This shift in women’s expectations of marriage requires men to be willing to participate more in daily household affairs. Several women in my study have managed to ask their husbands to participate more in domestic work, but men’s level of engagement in housework is still low.

In terms of sexual relations, there is also a significant change among later generations in my study. Rarely did older generations communicate about what kind of sexual relationship they would like to have, or how many children they wanted. The younger generation, in contrast, managed their marital relationship through intense communication about children and sexual relations. Most participants who married from 1995 onwards mentioned that their husbands gave them freedom to choose how many children to have, based on the readiness
whether to have more children or not. However, men still dominate in terms of initiating sex. Women only rarely invited their husband to have sex. Detailed discussion of the couple’s sexual relationships is provided in Chapters Six and Seven.

There are indications of a more democratic relationship in today’s marriages in West Java. This suggests a shift towards more flexible gender roles, especially in the sharing of duties and responsibilities between the partners. This could be traced to where these women acquired knowledge about marriage and sexuality, which may significantly influence women’s perceptions and expectations of marriage and sexuality. This will be explained in the next section.

**Sources of Knowledge about Marriage and Sexuality**

Women came to their marriage beds with...very little exact knowledge of sexual relations or the way their bodies worked. (Bauer, 1985, p. 121)

This quote describes the condition of women on their wedding night in Iran 28 years ago, as reported by Bauer (1985). This observation is relevant to the contemporary Indonesian context where many women have limited (if any) knowledge concerning sexual relations in marriage.

Data from my study suggest that no formal information is given to women about life in marriage or about sexual relations in marriage. Indonesia is still reluctant to offer sex education formally in the school curriculum despite many studies suggesting high demand for it. As a result, many women prior to marriage have to rely on themselves to find information about marital life, including sex. Preliminary knowledge may already have been obtained through observing their parents’ practices and cultural values. They gain further information from reading books, attending religious meetings or talking with friends, but even so some women have no information concerning marriage and sexuality before

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20 For further discussion concerning research on sex education see for example Parker (2008) and Utomo (2003).
They are even less likely to obtain information on sexual relations than they are on marital life due to the taboo and shame associated with the public discussion of sex in Indonesian society in general. The following section explains how women gain information concerning marriage and sexuality.

There are four main sources considered influential in providing information on marriage and sexuality according to the women I interviewed: marriage and sex manual books, *pengajian* (religious gatherings), peer conversation, and socially and culturally learned behaviour.

Out of the 42 women interviewed, 33 accessed information on marriage and sexuality from books they read; 13 women learned from discussions about marriage but not about sex; 15 women learned from religious gatherings; eight received information on marriage and sexuality from friends; four learned from parents about marriage and two respondents obtained information on sex from their parents as well. This data suggests that women commonly gain information from a combination of sources. Seven respondents mentioned that they did not know anything about marriage and sexual life in marriage prior to their marriage. However, I would categorise them as having knowledge from observing their parents or neighbourhood marriages even though this might not have been an intentional process.

**Islamic Marriage and Sex Manuals**

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a manual is “a book giving instructions or information” (Oxford Dictionary, 2010). A marriage and sex manual is a book that contains instruction and information concerning marriage and sex. It is a practical guide to sex and married life. For this study I differentiate this type of book from self-help books on marriage and sex. Self-help books advocate “the use of one’s own efforts and resources to achieve things without relying on others” (Oxford Dictionary, 2010). The self-help book on marriage and sex presumes self-motivation and self-reliance to improve the quality of one’s married life and sex life. The difference between manuals and self-help books on
marriage and sexuality is that the former give instruction and guidance for people who are getting married while the latter provide advice to married couples to improve the quality of married life, sometimes with “therapeutic ideas and values” (Grodin, 1991, p. 405). Hochschild (2003, p. 13) reports that the self-help “advice book” related to intimate life has become more popular in recent times than the traditional advice of families or religious authorities in America. In Indonesia, the genre of self-help book has flourished since the mid-1990s (Hariyadi, 2013).

Most of the participants referred to marriage and sex manual books to find information concerning marriage and sexuality. In this thesis I categorise two types of books that provide information on marriage and sexuality, as mentioned by participants. First are books related to marriage and sexuality in the Indonesian language, which are available in many bookstores (see figure 5). Marriage manual books are popular and can easily be obtained from bookstores in the city centre. Several participants noted that they read this kind of book before marriage, and some of them still read them today. This type of book provides guidance on marriage, including sexual life in marriage. Secondly, there are classical Islamic books (known as *kitab kuning*) on marriage and sexuality read by my participants while they were studying at pesantren (Islamic boarding school) (see figure 6).

Marriage manuals generally contain instructions or advice on marriage, from marriage preparation, the wedding ceremony and the first night, through to duties and rights for couples in raising children. Some books of both categories discuss sexual life in more detail than others. Most of the books that were referred to by the participants are written from Islamic perspectives. Thus, I consider this type of book as an Islamic marriage and sex manual. In this section I will review five books that have been read by several of my participants to represent the above-mentioned descriptions. Examples of the first category of marriage and sex manual books are as follows:
Figure 5: Islamic marriage and sex manual books

The first book, *Kado Pernikahan untuk Istriku* (Marriage gift for my wife) (1999), is written by a famous author, Muhamad Fauzil Adhim. This book is a compilation of his three books on marriage. It contains information on the engagement, the wedding ceremony, the wedding night, sexual etiquette in Islam, marital adjustment and raising children. The author starts by strongly encouraging marriage in Islam, but in a disproportionate way: he depicts unmarried people as having no place in Islam. For example, he devalues all good deeds that unmarried people have done and says that the deeds of the unmarried are never better than those of married people.

In the discussion of *malam zafaf* (the wedding night), the author explains the rituals for which both partners should prepare before this night, in order that it is unforgettable. Grooming before spending the night together for the first time is important in order to give a good impression. It is also suggested that the couple make ablutions and pray together. Before intercourse, certain prayers (*do’a*) should be recited. Further, the book suggests that the husband should be aware of the readiness of the wife to have intercourse for the first time: he should never force her and approach her gently. Foreplay (*muqaddimah*) is encouraged, to achieve mutual orgasm with touching and kissing. The wife is also encouraged to be active and attractive. Apart from this, the author also quoted Hadith

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mentioning that the wife should not refuse the husband’s sexual needs and should always be ready whenever he demands it.

The second book is *Seks Tak Sekedar Birahi: Panduan Lengkap Seputar Kesehatan Reproduksi: Tinjauan Islam dan Medis* (Sex is not just Lust: Comprehensive Guide on Reproductive Health from Islamic and Medical Perspectives) (2006) written by two authors: Hanny Ronosulistyo, a obstetrician and gynaecologist in Bandung and Aam Amiruddin, a famous preacher in Bandung. This book combines comprehensive information on reproductive health and sexuality from Islamic and medical perspectives. This book aims to end the taboo on discussions about sex between wife and husband, to increase knowledge on this matter and to intensify intimate relationships between wife and husband. The book contains thirteen chapters that begin with definitions of sex and health, and go on to elaborate adolescence sexuality, sexual intimacy in marriage, sexual and reproductive health, sexual rights and tips on how to avoid sexual and reproductive problems. There are many medical terms but these are accompanied by simple explanations that can be easily understood. The Islamic understanding comes from a moderate perspective that emphasises mutual recognition of sexual rights for both sexes. Compared to the first book, this book is more comprehensive, because it provides information on the human body and how it works to maximise health and encourage sexual relationships with religious support.

These two books provide information about many of the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, and cite many religious texts on the subject. However, their claims are not always valid. Many books on marriage and sexual manuals are written by male authors. It is hard to find books of this kind written by female authors. Based on my exploration of three big publishing companies in Indonesia (*Gramedia, Mizan* and *Gema Insani Press*), most of the books on this genre are written by men. In my opinion, this relates to the issue of male authority. Men are seen in patriarchal societies such as Indonesia as having authority in giving guidance, especially in marriage and sexual matters.
Explaining from a man’s perspective, the first book displays the traditional ideology of the wife – husband relationship based on values in traditional Islam: men have the power to control married life, including sexual relations. In sexual relations, although this book recognise the wife’s sexual desire and satisfaction, the husband is still the one who controls it and his sexual desire deserves more attention than that of the wife. The second book presents more balanced information and particularly emphasises the mutual rights of husband and wife in the sexual relationship.

The second category of marriage guidance manuals is the classical Islamic books (kitab kuning) read in pesantren. Those on marriage and sex are: *Kitab Uqdu al-lujayn fi Bayan al-Huquq al-Zawjayn* (Marital Bonds: Explanation of the Rights of the Wife and the Husband), *Qurratul ‘Uyun fi al-Nikah al-Syar’i y wa Adabihi* (The Comfort of the Eyes: Shar‘i Marriage and its Etiquette) and *al-Liqa baina al-Zawjayni* (Sexual Congress between Wife and Husband: Perspectives of the Qur‘an and Sunnah), all of which are written in Arabic and some are familiar among santri (pesantren students).

![Figure 6: Classical Islamic books on marriage and sex manuals](image)
The most popular book referred to by my respondents is *Kitab Uqud al-Lujayn (Uqud)*. This *Kitab* was written by Syeikh Nawawi al Bantani, a famous *ulama* from Banten, in 1878. This *Kitab* is very popular in the NU *pesantren* community and has become the main reference dealing with the marital relationship (Van Bruinessen, 1995). This book explains the traditional Islamic viewpoint of the husband-wife relationship on duties and rights, the suggestion that women pray at home, the prohibition on looking at the opposite sex and advice about the behaviour of women. Most of the explanations in this *Kitab* position women as secondary to men in marriage, giving the wife more duties than her husband. The main rule is that the wife should be obedient to the husband and provide him with sexual services. One striking feature of this *kitab* is that the author listed several conditions under which the husband is permitted to hit his wife, namely: when she refuses to beautify herself or to have sex, when she leaves the house without his permission or insults him. In fact, his opinion on violence toward wives has no basis in Islamic texts: it is only his opinion. This book mainly provides information about how the wife should behave in relation to her husband and not *vice versa*. It depicts the woman’s behaviour as defiant, ill-mannered and stupid. It is the husband’s duty to teach her, thus suggesting that the woman has less intellectual and religious ability. The author emphasises the physical and intellectual superiority of men over women.

*Kitab Uqud* has been criticised by progressive Muslims in Indonesia as establishing the patriarchal order through an unequal marital relationship. This *kitab* is believed to have influenced many Indonesians in their marital relationships. Several women in my study referred to this *kitab* as their guidance in their marital relationships. The Study Forum of *Kitab Kuning* (FK3=Forum Kajian Kitab Kuning) established by Sinta Nuriyah – the wife of former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid – initiated critique of this *kitab*. This critique aimed to trace the validity of the Prophetic reports and to clarify women’s position in Islam. According to this group, many Hadith cited in *Kitab Uqud* have no validity as being reported by the Prophet and have just been
fabricated (FK3, 2005, p. 34). This group has published books containing criticism of *Kitab Uqud*. Unfortunately, the critiques of *kitab Uqud* are not yet widely known, and students (*santri*) do not read these versions alongside the *Kitab Uqud*.

Another *kitab* that is important in giving information about marital sexual relations in Indonesia is *Qurratul ‘Uyun* written by Imam Abu Muhammad al-Tihami (2005). This book contains a sex manual based on detailed Islamic etiquette. The *kitab* starts by encouraging readers to marry and expounding on the benefits of marriage. Then, it presents guidance on sexual relationships as follows: the favoured and unfavoured times to have sex; the rituals before intercourse (ablution, praying and reciting prayers); the foods that increase and decrease sexual desire; the importance of foreplay; the recommended position for sex (missionary position) with detailed steps to achieve the most exciting sexual intercourse for both partners.

*Kitab Qurratul ‘Uyun* is also popular among *santri* (students) in *pesantren* but less popular than *kitab Uqud*. This *kitab* is considered an advanced level in giving information on marital sexual relationships in *pesantren*. Only *santri* who are mature and are preparing for marriage can read this *kitab*. Only two respondents mentioned having read this *kitab* compared to 13 women who had read *kitab Uqud*.

*Kitab Uqud* is usually learned in *pesantren* at the intermediate level. Most of the women I interviewed mentioned that when they read it they did not understand its content because at that time they were still a long way from considering marriage. Some women (Ida and Sandra) assessed *kitab Uqud* and the explanations given by the teacher (*ustadz*) as indecent (*jorok*) because it gives

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23 In Indonesian, the word *jorok* originally means dirty, but it is also used metaphorically as lewd (*cabul*) (KBBI= Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia online, 2012).
detailed explanations of intercourse and mentions the sexual organs. Many of my research participants were still significantly informed and influenced by *kitab Uqud* and referred to this *kitab* in their daily sexual relationships.

The third *kitab* is *Al-Liqa baina al-Zawjayn* (*Liqa*). It was written by Abdul Qadir Ahmad ‘Atha from Cairo in 1980. This *kitab* aims at giving information about wife-husband relationships based on the Qur’an and Sunnah and it includes information on bodily cleanliness that can increase the couple’s intimacy. The book begins by explaining the meaning of certain Arabic words in Qur’anic verses about the conjugal relationship, such as the word *sukun* (tranquility), *mawaddah wa rahmah* (love and mercy) from Q. 30: 21 and *libas* (garment in Q. 2: 187). The author explains that the word *sukun* means free from any worry and fear and the couple feel full of love, safe and confident. The word *libas* means covering each other’s limitations by complementing each other. When two people unite in one body at intercourse both of them feel joyful and satisfaction in exploring each other’s body. The word *libas* is mentioned in the Qur’an interchangeably between wife and husband to show that there is mutuality and tenderness between the couple in word or deed (cf. Munir, 2002).

*Kitab Liqa* is promising in giving information on marital sexual relationship as it puts emphasis the couple’s mutual need to fulfil themselves sexually. Foreplay, like sweet words and kissing (not limited to lips and face), is strongly recommended for both partners to achieve pleasurable sex. This *kitab* also dismisses the assumption that it is forbidden to be fully naked during intercourse (several women in this study said so). The author showed the Hadith that support this assumption are *dla’if* (weak/unreliable). The author also provided the *shahih* Hadith (valid/reliable report) that it is fine to be fully naked during intercourse and to see each other’s naked body (p. 92). Unfortunately, *kitab Liqa* is

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24 “And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility (*sukun*) with them, and He has put love (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*warahmah*) between your (hearts).” (Q. 30:21)

25 “Permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garments (*libas*) and ye are their garments (*libas*)” (Q. 2: 187)
not yet popular among santri in pesantren. Based on my observation and interview with the kyai in Eastern Bandung, only one pesantren uses this kitab and the kyai claimed that no pesantren besides his own includes this kitab in the curriculum.26

From the above, we can conclude that the second and third kitab are quite promising in giving information on sexuality within a less hierarchical marital relationship, where the emphasis is on mutual satisfaction in sex. These last two books, which advocate equality between the couple, are preferable to the kitab Uqud, and it may be that the kitab Uqud should in fact no longer be read. This review confirms that sex education has been initiated within pesantren.

**Pengajian (Religious Study Gatherings)**

Other sources that respondents identified as influential in giving information about marriage and sexual relations were pengajian (religious gatherings) or majlis ta’lim (women’s religious gatherings).27 These gatherings are usually attended by married women, most of whom are elderly. The themes are various but generally and foremost the preachers explain about the marital duties of women in relation to their husbands. The women I interviewed referred to some of the topics they had covered in majlis ta’lim: ta’at (being obedient to the husband), never refusing a husband satisfaction of his sexual needs, how to behave toward the husband, and encouragement to be patient (sabar) and forgiving (pemaaf) if they experience problems in marriage.

Through pengajian, married women are given spiritual solutions to the problems they experience during marriage, but these ‘solutions’ usually consists of convincing them that they will be rewarded in the hereafter – not an immediate solution for their real problems. These pengajian are influential in imposing religious messages because the messages are delivered repeatedly during their weekly or monthly gatherings and because they are backed up by ‘dalil’ (religious

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26 Interview with the kyai of al-Khomis pesantren on July 13, 2012.
27 I will discuss majlis ta’lim in more detail in Chapter Nine.
argument or proof-texts). One of my participants, Rani (43), said that since she has been actively engaged in majlis ta’lim, she has been influenced by the messages given by the preacher: “We have to obey what is said in pengajian because there is dalil supporting the suggestion from religious texts; whether we like it or not.” Her example was that whenever she can’t be bothered having sex with her husband, she said she had to do it because it is her duty, whether she enjoyed it or not. Marcoes (1992, p. 22) has described how topics related to women’s position are discussed in majlis ta’lim but they do not empower the audience with the knowledge that women have certain rights in Islam. Instead, many preachers (including women preachers) emphasise the duty of women to be obedient to and serve their husband.

**Peer Conversation**

Friends who are already married were considered reliable sources of information on marriage and sexual relations. Through informal conversation they shared their experiences of life in marriage and that sometimes included their sexual relations. The women I interviewed explicitly referred to their friends as sources of information on marriage. This conversation usually took place during special gatherings, while ‘hanging out’ or in home visits.

Maya (aged 41) and Ina (aged 33) shared their experience of gaining information from their friends. Ina said:

> My friend said that in marriage you will experience happiness and unhappiness. The happy side is that you will have someone at your side who can protect you and share everything with you, but the sad side of it is when you quarrel with your husband or when a ‘third’ person interferes in the marriage.

According to Maya and Ina this ‘third’ person can be the mother-in-law, relatives or ‘another woman’.

Friends also share common beliefs about how marital relationships should be, for example, the beliefs that a wife should serve her husband in every aspect of
married life, take care of the children and never refuse her husband sex. For example, Nanda (aged 36), said: “My friend told me that when you are married, you should never refuse your husband’s sexual demands if he asks for it.” Heni (aged 51) also mentioned:

One thing that I remembered about the conversation with friends was that a wife should give full service toward the husband. I myself consider that I still cannot provide full service to my husband because I also work. In my opinion, it depends upon the couple’s agreement in the arrangement of the house. My friend also shared about the wedding night, about how the husband will be pleased if the bride is a virgin.

Virginity is highly valued in Indonesian society. Although most women are virgins at their first marriage, as a result of abstinence imposed by the zina concept, there are of course many cases where the couple was married because they engaged in pre-marital sex that caused pregnancy. In Indonesia it is usually called by the joke acronym, MBA (married by accident).

The workplace is also a place to share about marital experiences but only among close friends. They might also share their sexual experiences, but usually only among other married friends and not among singles. Married women keep such matters secret from single women and lower their voices when talking. They will giggle and even laugh out loud when they consider the story amusing. However, occasionally, sexual experience might be shared with single women who are approaching marriage as experienced by Wiwi (aged 50) and Ikah (aged 30) who were told by their married friends about marital and sexual experiences. At that time, they were single but were getting married soon. Ikah said:

My friend scared me by mentioning that during the first night, on the wedding night, the first intercourse will hurt, and if you refuse him, he will force you to have sex. I felt scared at that time, but luckily, my husband was not that kind of person, he is gentle and kind.
Learned Behaviour

Some of the women I interviewed depended on learned patterns of behaviour for their knowledge of marriage. They depended upon the content of the cultural patterns with which they had had contact – most of these were parental practices and behaviour in the neighbourhood. This means that they observed the behaviour of persons around them and these behaviours became their reference point in their own situation.

Observation of and learning from parental and neighbours’ behaviour was the most common source of knowledge for my respondents. Parental marriage practices can become inspirational in motivating women to emulate the pattern or to avoid an unwanted pattern. Sandra (aged 57) said:

I observed my mother’s attitude toward my father. My mother always served my father satisfactorily; she dressed nicely in front of him; was at home when he arrived; and obtained permission before leaving home. I do that too to my husband.

Parental and neighbourhood marital disharmony and divorce were also a lesson to be learned for some women, so as not to experience failure in marriage. Sinta (aged 40) mentioned: “I hate seeing divorce in other people’s marriages, because I am a victim of my parent’s divorce and I did not like it.” Mala (aged 40) said:

I observed the marriages of people in my neighbourhood. In most of them I saw negative experiences of failed marriages. Television also contributed to showing negative images of marriage by exposing celebrities’ marital conflicts publicly. This concerned me as I planned to get married.

It seems that parents fail to give adequate information on marriage and sexuality to their children who are ready for marriage. Only four women mentioned that they were informed by their parents about marriage prior to their wedding; two of them said that their mothers gave them some information about sexual relations in marriage. Leli (aged 29) said that, “My mother told me to be cautious in making my relationship with my parents-in-law; to always make a good
relationship with them. Being married to their son does not mean that I possess him completely.” In terms of sexual relations, her mother also told her, “As a wife it is OK to be sexually active (agresif) toward the husband as if you are a prostitute. A prostitute is sexually active in unlawful sex; you are sexually active in lawful sex.”

Several women also said that they were informed by their elders about traditional values of marital relationships. However, several said that these values had less influence on their marital life than Islamic teachings. Maya (aged 41) simply said, “I ignored teachings like ‘istri mah dulang ti nande’ (that women should always wait for the husband’s instruction). There should be mutuality in a marital relationship.” Similarly, Ida (aged 36) mentioned that her mother-in-law mentioned certain customs that she needed to do or should not do, but she simply ignored those.

**Learning by Doing**

Prior to getting married, several women I interviewed had no information about what marriage is, let alone about sexual relations in marriage. The reasons for this situation are various and may include not having access to available sources or simply not wanting to think about it. Some argued that this knowledge is something that you can only gain through experience: you learn something while doing it. In my opinion, though, these women have acquired preliminary knowledge about marriage through observation, but they were simply unaware of their own knowledge.

Some of the participants mentioned that they were unaware of the concept of marital and sexual knowledge. Others were simply inattentive to all matters related to marriage. Rosa (aged 44) said: “I did not want to think of marriage. I just waited until I experienced it.”

Based on the above, some women acquired knowledge of marriage and sexuality through reading books, attending pengajian, peer conversation and learning from
the behaviour of parents and neighbours. Other women simply thought that they would learn about marriage through being married.

To conclude, this chapter showed that women are under pressure to get married as a social and religious obligation. As a result, women experience uncertainty between holding to their own expectation of marriage and attending to social expectation. Unfortunately, this pressure does not at the same time give women appropriate access to knowledge they need about marriage and sexual relations. Some of the sources the women mentioned in this study do not adequately provide knowledge and understanding.

The only program that gives information to the couple prior to marriage is at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), where marriages are validated and registered. My participants see this program as ineffective. Detailed discussion of this program, which is called SUSCATIN (Kursus Calon Pengantin, Pre-marital Information Session), will be provided in the next chapter.
Chapter Five
Prelude to Marriage: Finding the Right *Jodoh* (Soul-mate) for Life

Central to women’s pathway to marriage is finding the right man to be their marriage partner; the partner to share life in both happiness and unhappiness; a person who understands and accepts his wife’s limitations and who can share the marriage goals; a partner with whom one is destined to be with, often called *jodoh*.

Selection of a partner can be a stage of excitement as well as complexity for women. They have to find someone who suits not only their preference but also their family, and social and religious standards.

This section addresses the steps that Muslim women take in preparing for their journey prior to marriage. The steps include finding and selecting an ideal marriage partner, courtship and the administrative process of registering the marriage. Some of the questions emerging in women’s minds are: will they find the right person to be their *jodoh*? How will they find their *jodoh*? How do religion and culture influence their decision in selecting a mate?

**The Criteria for an Ideal Marriage Partner**

The previous chapter explained that physical attractiveness, a good job, and wealth were the most significant criteria in selecting the mates for many women I interviewed. Apart from these criteria, women did list several other qualities equally important in choosing their future husband. Specifically, there were three more characteristics that most women would like their future husband to have: better religious knowledge, good personal character, and being supportive.

Women considered that religious knowledge is important when choosing their future husband, because the man is going to be the leader and *imam* (who leads prayer) within marriage. To be an *imam* he should have memorised Qur’anic
verses and be fluent in reciting them. Ida (aged 36) for example said that when her brother wanted to introduce her to a potential suitor, Ida refused right away knowing that he came from a city that is known to be not particularly religious. Ida’s brother convinced her that the man had graduated from an Islamic university, and assured her that he was a devoted Muslim. After several meetings, Ida agreed to marry him.

Hera (aged 28) also shared that she had been worried about her boyfriend’s lack of religious knowledge, doubting that he would make a good family leader. On the contrary, Hera’s boyfriend was impressed by her religious knowledge. They finally got married and Hera’s husband endeavours to increase his religious knowledge. Mia (aged 25) also told me that her boyfriend did not want to let her go because she taught him things related to religion he did not know.

The above mentioned experiences confirmed that women also have religious ability in relation to men. Thus, it is misleading to assume that women lack religious knowledge and that the husband needs to educate his wife. Within marriage sharing knowledge between wife and husband is necessary to improve the quality of the marriage and to achieve marriage goals together without demeaning either partner. Men and women have the same opportunity and capacity to learn religious knowledge and have the same responsibility to disseminate their knowledge (Q.S. 9: 71).

Another important quality for a future husband was a good personal character (baik). When the women felt that the person basically had a good character and demonstrated his attitude not only toward her but also toward her family, he was considered a suitable prospective partner. Mala (aged 40) and Aas (aged 28) shared similar experiences for mate preference.

Everything is going well between our two families. We both feel comfortable with each other and we are getting closer each day. I know him and his family and so does my family. And there is strength between us to continue this relationship into marriage. I see him as a kind man. (Mala)
He’d been so good to me, bringing me presents and involving me in many activities in the neighbourhood. At first, I did not love him but his kindness softened my heart and after that we courted (pacaran) for two years before we were married. My family also supported our relationship. (Aas)

Being supportive was also considered important in managing the relationship. Many women expected their future husband would support them after marriage in studying, working, or engaging in other activities. Mia (aged 25) said:

It took some time to get to know each other better. I needed to know my boyfriend’s ethnic background and his character. I found it difficult to trust people at the time because I was still traumatised by my previous fiance who called off the wedding. So, I needed to know all about him in detail, and that included whether he would support me if I wanted to pursue further study or to work after getting married.

There are cultural and religious standards of acceptable mates. Women have to deal with these preferred standards, sometimes by ignoring their own preferences. It is a common standard for a future husband to be a man who has a good job and is older than the woman herself. Situmorang (2011, p. 83) reports that traditional standards recommend women to “marry up” and men to “marry down” in terms of age, education and wealth. According to her, this standard has left well-educated and older women and poor men overlooked and resulted in the rise of singlehood. Two-thirds of the women I interviewed had husbands who were 2 to 12 years older than themselves. Heni (aged 51) stated that when her uncle introduced her to a man who was ten years older than her, she accepted him. She mentioned that she preferred to have a husband much older than her in order that he could guide and care for her.

Although several women I interviewed had the opportunity to choose their own marriage partners, several others said they didn’t have much choice over who they married or were courted by. It was usually the man who approached the woman for courting or marriage, it being considered inappropriate for a woman to initiate courtship or to tell a man she ‘likes’ or ‘loves’ him. There are various
ways for a women to select her partner and to get to know him better through courtship. The next section explores different categories in finding a marriage partner.

**Courtship: Self-Choice, Arranged and God-Given Jodoh (Soul-mate)**

A common way to select a mate is through courtship. There are many different forms of courtship in Indonesia, from traditional courtship to a more modern way of mate selection. Bennett (2002) explains that there are three courtship categories in Lombok, namely: “midang (customary courtship) in a woman’s natal home, pacaran modern (modern courtship practices), and pacaran backstreet (secret courtship)” (p. 96). In West Java, there is a type of courtship similar to midang, named nganjang (bertamu/bertandang) means “to pay a visit” (Rigg, 1862, p. 39) or apél (modern use, originally meant ceremony) where a man visits his girlfriend in her house. Unlike in Lombok, apél only takes place on Saturday night (malam minggu). It is usually an exciting time for women on malam minggu, waiting for their boyfriends to come; but for those who have no boyfriend, malam minggu can be a painful time. Situmorang (2011) reports that for single men who still live with their parents, staying at home on a Saturday night was uncomfortable, as they were interrogated by their parents. Clearly the expectation is that on Saturday nights, young men will be out courting.

In modern times a new courtship pattern has emerged, which allows the couple to occupy a freer space away from parental sight. In this stage the boyfriend picks up his girlfriend from her house or they simply make an appointment to meet in a certain place. In urban areas, they then go to venues such as shopping malls, recreational areas, pubs and restaurants.

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28 Midang also appears in Sundanese language with a different meaning. Midang in Sundanese literally means exhibit, good performance; active participation; or to go about for pleasure (Rigg, 1862, p. 36).
Many women among my participants met their boyfriends at school, their workplace, neighbourhood or at local festivities. For example Acih (aged 49) who owns a small kiosk, mentioned that she first met her husband when she watched a wayang golek (wooden puppet)\textsuperscript{29} performance in a neighbouring village. Another woman, Eha (aged 29) said that she met her husband in a kuda renggong\textsuperscript{30} (a dance horse) performance; he was one of the performers.

Many women who have the opportunity to pursue further education start their relationship with men as friends. Many of them attend the same school and university, where they are allowed to interact regularly and feelings develop from friends to lovers. Sari (aged 42) mentioned that she was in a relationship with her boyfriend for almost eight years, starting from their first year of undergraduate studies until they finished their Master degrees.

Half of the women I interviewed chose their boyfriends and husbands for themselves, while the other half met their suitors through intermediaries arranged by a third party. A third party who arranges the meeting of the couple can be a family member like parents, brother/sister or uncle/aunt, or a friend. The process of arranged-mate introduction took place directly (meeting both parties face to face) or indirectly, by giving each person the other’s pictures or phone numbers. Initial meeting can be arranged by those third parties or the couple and the rest of the process is left to the couple. During the initial period, the couple might exchange personal information. After this stage, they may consider seeing each other again and continuing their relationship to a further stage, or they might end it.

\textsuperscript{29} Wayang golek is a Sundanese traditional wooden puppet show; usually performed in hajatan (wedding or male circumcision celebration) or in Agustusan (Indonesian Independence Day celebration on 17 August).

\textsuperscript{30} Kuda renggong is a Sundanese traditional cultural performance originally from Sumedang and still commonly performed in Eastern Bandung, the site where I conducted fieldwork. It contains traditional music like kendang (drum), gong and flute accompanied by a song from a sinden (singer). It is performed mostly to accompany a circumcised boy who rides on a dance horse and is paraded along the village main road.
Arranged-mate selection by family member sometimes lead to forced marriage. Research in another area of West Java also showed that early and forced marriage still occurs particularly in rural areas (Iswarini, 2011). Arranged-mate selection by friends was more relaxed because the couples had freedom to make their own decision. Women were not forced to accept the candidates in this pairing process.

This pairing process was preferred by Siti (aged 40) because she was not interested in courtship. She said that she never thought of having a boyfriend and wanted to concentrate on studying instead. It was her brother who introduced her to his friend and they married soon after. Another respondent, Ani (aged 45) said that it was her friend who introduced her to her suitor. They met once and after that she prayed istikharoh to ask guidance from God. Two weeks after that, they decided to get married and sought approval from her mother.

Seven participants had their mates chosen for them by family members. Rosa (aged 44) accepted her parents’ choice of marriage partner. She already had a boyfriend at that time but it was not really a serious relationship. She agreed with her parent’s proposal, as she was confident that her parents would choose the best partner for her. She said, “I hadn’t met him until a few minutes before the ahd (marriage contract) took place. But luckily, he is a man with a good character, fine job and is good looking too.” Minah (aged 50) at age 13 was introduced to a man seven years older than her by her parents. She said that she was also interested in him and agreed to marry. Minah delayed the union with her husband for two months because she was not ready for conjugal relationship.

For the women whose mates and marriages were arranged, the process of getting to know one another could be quite short. Several women only had a chance to become acquainted one week prior to marriage. A new type of romance was also reported by Smith-Hefner (2011), among university students who belong to a

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31 Praying istikharoh is usually performed when someone is uncertain about something and they need guidance whether it is good or bad. By performing it, it is believed that God will send a sign of a possible choice in various ways, allowing one to make the best decision. It is also used for choosing which person is best for one’s future husband/wife.
conservative Islamic student organisation, which promotes no courtship stage prior to marriage. They tend to skip the courtship process, which is considered sinful according to their interpretation, and if someone has the desire to marry, the organisation will arrange a candidate for him/her.

The courtship period enables the woman to examine the quality of her boyfriend and decide whether he will be a suitable marriage partner. A certain period of courtship gives them time to decide whether the relationship might lead to marriage. A break-up early in the courtship process is common but break-ups after a long-term relationship can cause sadness and heartbreak, regardless of who broke it off. Several women I interviewed experienced trauma when their boyfriends called off their wedding.

In the process of finding the right mate, women often mentioned that the one who becomes the husband is their jodoh (cf. Jennaway, 2002a). If the people are already destined to be matched (berjodoh), nothing can prevent them from being united (kalau sudah jodoh tidak akan lari ke mana). Even if, in the first place, one person thinks that they would never consider one another as their jodoh, if their fate is indeed to be together, then they will become a couple. Finding this jodoh involves matched feelings of cocok (suitability). Conversely, if the person is not destined to be her/his jodoh, no matter how hard they try to unite, it will never happen. They believe that God determines this pairing process – a common phrase is that jodoh is in the hands of God (jodoh ada di tangan Tuhan). Bennett (2005a, p. 46) notes that jodoh is “determined by destiny and spiritual compatibility and therefore requires religious consummation.” The couple is considered as jodoh for each other until they are married. And if a person is destined to be one’s jodoh, one should accept that unquestionably, otherwise one is denying God’s will. Wiwi (aged 47), when asked why she stayed in her marriage even when she discovered after a year of marriage that her husband was a married man, said that he was already her jodoh: “What can I do, he is my jodoh and I should accept him submissively (pasrahi) and beside, it was too late (sudah terlanjur).” There is a famous Sundanese saying: “jodo, pati, bagja, cilaka
kagungan Gusti Allah”, which means that soul-mates, death, happiness, and accidents are in God’s command. People believe that humans cannot do anything about these things. This idea is also usually called takdir, or human fate.

**Intimacy in Courtship: Courtship Behaviour and Personal Control**

Having conversation and going out together, just the two of us – we had already transgressed a proper courtship behaviour.  
(Hera, aged 28)

In a society where virginity is highly valued for women, protecting women from ‘uncontrolled’ sexual behaviour is essential in the name of chastity. For women I interviewed, preserving chastity was very important. The quote shows that for Hera, who was raised within a very religious family background, her courtship behaviour was considered to exceed the limits of propriety. She quickly clarified that what she meant by exceeding the limit was talking and going out with her boyfriend and no more than that. But still, she perceived that behaviour as transgression. She vowed to abstain from further intimate courtship behaviour, but she was aware that she sometimes was unable to control her desire. She said “As a human who also has desires, I cannot avoid satan’s (evil) temptation.” To avoid any further transgression in courtship and any gossip from the community where she lived, she asked her boyfriend to marry her.

After the first meeting at her sister’s house, Rani (43) and her suitor courted for six months. She mentioned that she was not officially courting like others, as her sister was very strict and did not allow her to do so. There was no concept of pacaran, according to her sister, in Islam. During that period, they never touched one another physically, such as holding hands, or went out alone as a couple. Once, she mentioned, they went to the city centre (jalan-jalan), but they were accompanied by her niece.

There is a cultural expectation in Indonesia that women will be passive in courtship and marriage relationships. Passivity is considered a way of maintaining women’s chastity and purity. In general, women are ordered to
control their desire, especially by not engaging in pre- or extra-marital sex; but men are not subject to the same injunctions: it is common for them to engage in such behaviour. Men are not subjected to social or even legal punishment. Leli (aged 29) said that “as a woman we were advised not to speak about our feelings openly to a man in advance. We should wait for a man to initiate it.”

Having a boyfriend is considered normal for many Indonesian women, however, many women also decide not to. There are various reasons why women choose not to have a boyfriend or to be involved in courtship and these may be personal. Situmorang (2011) reports that for lower-class women workers, their long working day was the reason they had no time to look for a boyfriend. For the above-mentioned women, study and religion were two reasons among many others. Similar findings were reported by Parker (2009, p. 80-81) for young women in West Sumatra: that having a boyfriend could disturb study and was forbidden by religion. Some women in my study, like Leli, Mala and Hera, had boyfriends but emphasised self-respect and self-control in their courtship behaviour. Parker (2009) reported that for senior school students in West Sumatra, school makes a significant contribution in imposing “a curriculum of the body”: she argues that school rules about uniform, daily routines and socialising behaviour are interrelated with the wider discursive context of moral and religious training for girls, in order that they maintain “modesty, virtue and virginity” (Parker, 2009, p. 79).

For women, to be valuable means always guarding their chastity as their self respect. Not engaging in free sex means respecting their selves, and signifies their responsibility and commitment to their parents, community and religion. Self control and knowing the limits of proper behaviour in courtship is important for women. Any behaviour that they consider ‘inappropriate’ should be avoided as far as possible, such as conversing with a boyfriend, going out together as a couple (Hera), hand-holding (Rani) or kissing (Leli), and they may consider this behaviour as close to zina. Similar findings were reported by Bennett and Parker:
respondents associated intimate relations other than intercourse, such as hand-holding, kissing, and embracing, as *zina* (Bennett, 2007; Parker, 2009).

The religious concept of *zina* is central to women’s perception of intimacy in courtship and they manage to avoid it as much as they can. The concept of *satan* (evil) or temptation in courtship is also significant in their opinion. Religious texts mention that a man and woman who are not *muhrim* should never be allowed to be together without being chaperoned by a third party. Bennett (2007) suggests that this concept of *zina* is central in promoting and implementing sex education in Indonesia.

**Marriage Preparation and Registering the Marriage**

*Marriage Preparation: Engagement, Marriage Proposal and Marital Agreement*

The next step of courtship, when the relationship has become stable, is either an engagement period or marriage proposal. The women consider a relationship stable by several indicators, such as intense meeting, developing romantic feelings, and close relations with the family members of their fiancé/suitor.

The engagement process involves both families meeting (usually in the woman’s house) to tighten the couple’s relationship, symbolised by exchanging rings. The rings mean that the parties, although they may not be ready for marriage, are tied to each other and that marriage is their goal. However, engagement does not always guarantee that the couple will end up married, as experienced by two of my respondents. Maya and Leli were both engaged for several years to men of their choice, but after some consideration they ended the engagements and instead married men they had known for just a couple of months. The reasons for breaking the engagements were different for the two women. Maya (aged 41) for example ended her engagement because she met another man to whom she felt more connected and comfortable than her fiancé. Leli (aged 29) was engaged for one year and six months, but was not sure about marrying her fiancé as she

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32 *Muhrim* is the close relatives of the opposite sex, whom a Muslim may not marry, and see footnote 18.
noted that he was very dependent on his mother (*anak mami*). She met another man in her workplace who was more mature and independent than her former fiancé.

A marriage proposal is submitted by the man and/or his family toward his prospective wife’s family. It is the man who asks the woman to marry and never otherwise, although sometimes the woman might urge the man to do so. During the process of courtship, parental approval is important for women. When a woman feels comfortable with a suitor, she will introduce him to her parents to seek approval. If the parents approve, the woman will then ask the man to propose formally. However, many suitors take a short cut: the man observes the woman and when he decides that she is the woman he is looking for, he will deal directly with the woman’s parents instead of her. If the parents are interested, they will then ask their daughter whether she will accept him or not. It is the woman who decides after consultation with her parents.

This process was experienced by Lina (aged 37) who stated:

> He [her suitor] had a conversation directly with my parents and asked my parents if he could marry me. Then, my parents asked me for my decision. I was still unsure about him, but I accepted him because of his kindness. I saw that he approached my parents directly, which meant he was serious, although I did not know his character. After a week, he proposed and then we got married. It was so quick.

When marriage is an ideal norm, pressure for marriage is high, especially for women. Thus, several women I interviewed accepted a proposal to marry regardless of their uncertain feelings toward the suitor, for various reasons. Among the women I interviewed, there were five possible reasons, as follows: (1) pressure to marry; (2) the man showed kindness; (3) there had been only one serious proposal; (4) the woman was afraid that if she refused him there would be no other man who would take her as a wife; and (5) love (which came later in their relationship).
The pressure to marry for women leads them to accept any available candidate who seems serious and many said that it was better to accept any man than none at all. Several women mentioned their uncertain feelings toward their prospective husband, even when they agreed to get married. Various reasons for this uncertainty, including: they have no romantic feelings for him (*tidak/belum cinta*) as experienced by Yuni, Ina and Nisa; they don’t know their suitor’s personal character, noted by Iis, Lina and Wida; they are not ready for marriage, experienced by Rani, Minah and Acih; they are anxious about marriage, noted by Mala and they have exceed the marriage age as experienced by Sofi (aged 34), Yuni (aged 30), and Ani (aged 38) - these are their ages at their first marriage).

Yuni (aged 39) told me that:

I accepted him because I was 30 at that time. Although I felt distant from him because I still hoped for my ex-boyfriend, I agreed to marry due to my age, *lillahi ta’ala* (all the matter surrendered to God), feelings [of love/like] can develop later in marriage.

Other women observed:

I married for the sake of my parents who urged me to get married. In fact, I was not that interested in my boyfriend and wanted to find the right person for marriage. (Ina, aged 33)

The truth was I was not ready for marriage yet. If I heard the word marriage, I felt like an old lady. I still wanted to search for a rich and good-looking man. But, my husband was the only man who showed his sincerity toward me. (Rani, aged 43)

We were very certain when we decided to get married. But when it got closer to the wedding day, I felt a strange feeling, a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety. Many questions emerged, is he the right person for me? Will he be a good husband? Will our marriage last forever? Will we accept each other’s characters? (Mala, aged 40)

Apart from the above-mentioned experiences, around half of the women I interviewed felt confident in their decision to marry. Having romantic feelings
for their prospective husbands was the most commonly given reason. These women developed their feelings of love/like during the courtship period. Care, attentiveness and passion from their suitors were indications for continuing their relationship to the next level. “The reason I decide to marry him is not because of his wealth, but because of his love and affection.” (Maya, aged 41) and Aas (aged 28) also said that “My boyfriend is very attentive and cares for me and I love him.”

For several women, before getting marriage, an agreement was made with their prospective husbands. Leli (aged 29) stated that before getting married she explained to her suitor that she had a sick mother and she was the one who supported the family. Her suitor agreed to take over her responsibilities in supporting her family financially after marriage. Thus, every month her husband sends money to her family.

**Registering the Marriage**

*Indonesian Marriage Law*

Marriage law in Indonesia is regulated by the Indonesian Marriage Law No. 1/1974. This law was implemented a year later under governmental regulation/PP. no. 9/ 1975. It was reported that the process of establishing this marriage law in Indonesia was highly political, with disputes among Muslims and other religions (Katz & Katz, 1975; Blackburn & Bessell, 1997). It is also worth noting the role of women’s organisations, which at that time made significant contributions in initiating the establishment of the Indonesian Marriage Law no.1/1974 (Katz & Katz, 1975; Blackburn & Bessell, 1997).

Some important issues regulated in this Marriage Law include: the requirement to register the marriage and divorce, the limitations in practicing polygyny, the establishment of minimum marriage age for men (19 years old) and for women (16 years old), the regulation on marital property and custody of children.
Despite the significant achievements in regulating family life in Indonesia, this law still posits an unequal relation between wife and husband. Although it states in Chapter VI, article 31 (1) that “the wife has equal rights and position to that of the husband in marriage and social life”, the next point differentiates their roles as follow: (3) “the husband is the head of the family and the wife is the mother of the household (housewife)”. Article 34 (1) further mentions that “husbands are responsible for protecting their wives and for providing all the necessities of life for the household, in keeping with their capability” and article 34 (2) clearly lays out the wife’s territory: “wives are obliged to organise the household as well as possible”. This law has restricted the women’s role to the domestic sphere, under the protection of the husband. In Indonesia, the gender role attached to women as promoted by the state in the New Order regime is that women’s responsibility is at home, as wives and mothers: managing the household and taking care of the children. Meanwhile, men’s duty is in the public sphere as provider and protector (Suryakusuma, 1996; Robinson, 2009).

Unequal marital relationships promoted in the Marriage Law has resulted in criticism from several women’s organisations, who demand changes in certain articles to address unequal relations between husband and wife. Several women’s organisations, initiated by LBH APIK (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Asosiasi Perempuan Indonesia pro Keadilan, Institution for Legal Aids of Indonesian Women’s Association for Justice) and JKP3 (Jaringan Kerja Prolegnas Pro Perempuan, National Network of Pro-women National Legislation Program) have prepared a draft amendment to this Marriage Law no.1/1974 to accommodate gender equality. The amendment includes the abolition of polygyny and point 3, article 31 of Chapter VI concerning division of labour in marriage, and the establishment of equal rights and duties between husband and wife based on mutual agreement (Munti, 2012; Draft Amendment of Marriage Law, personal communication, 2012).
The Role of KUA

Based on the Indonesian Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974, Chapter I article 2, point 2, stating that “every marriage should be registered in accordance with the pertinent laws”, an institution for marriage registration has been established by the government. For those who are Muslims, the marriage registration takes place in KUA, while for non-Muslims, the registration can be carried out in the civil registration office (kantor catatan sipil). KUA which stands for Kantor Urusan Agama (Office of Religious Affairs) is the operational unit of the Islamic Guidance division (Bimas: Bimbingan Masyarakat Islami) at The Ministry of Religious Affairs that has been established in each kecamatan (sub-district) across Indonesia. Its role is to provide marriage registration and reconciliation services and also to supervise other religious activities. Previously, KUA also handled the divorce process (Nakamura, 1983). Nowadays, KUA only records divorce after it has been processed and the verdict delivered at the Religious Court. The head of KUA serves as PPN (Petugas Pencatat Nikah, marriage registrar) and is often selected from senior penghulu. Penghulu is the person in charge of conducting the marriage. PPN is responsible for supervising, registering and concluding the marriage. In their daily activities, the PPN appoints assistants, including other penghulu and P3N. P3N which stands for Pembantu Petugas Pencatat Nikah (the marriage registrar assistant) is the assistant of the penghulu appointed in each village (usually a community leader) to help the PPN collect the data of the people who are planning to get married but live far away from KUA.

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33 Based on Governmental Regulation/Peraturan Pemerintah (PP) Republik Indonesia No. 9 Year 1975 tentang pelaksanaan undang-undang nomor 1 tahun 1974 tentang perkawinan (on the implementation of Marriage Law no.1/1974).

34 Based on The Regulation of Ministry of Religious Affairs/Peraturan Menteri Agama (PMA) No. 39 Year 2012 of the organisation and work procedures of KUA.

35 Based on The Regulation of Ministry of Religious Affairs/Peraturan Menteri Agama (PMA) No. 11. 2007 on PPN (marriage registrar).
For those who are planning to get married, there are certain documents that must be prepared for registering the marriage, namely: (1) a copy of the residential identity card (KTP); (2) a statement that the party has not yet married (for single women and men); or a statement that they are widowed or divorced verified by the local authority or by divorce certificate; (3) a letter of information/recommendation concerning the marriage from the local authority; and (4) completed forms issued by the KUA which are called the N-forms.

All these documents should be lodged to the KUA where the marriage ceremony will take place, at least ten days in advance. In West Java, as the wedding usually takes place in the woman’s residential area, this requirement is lodged at the KUA in the woman’s domicile. The PPN will then check all requirements (especially in relation to age), to determine whether the couple fulfils the requirements of marriage age according to the Law, guardianship and marital status. According to the penghulu I interviewed, they have to be attentive in checking these three requirements as many cases have shown that couples give false information. The KUA officer will cooperate with the P3N and local government to check the validity of information given by the parties.

Wiwi’s husband submitted false information when marrying Wiwi. Wiwi (aged 47) did not know that her husband was a married man. She only found out one year into their marriage. Wiwi’s husband told me during the interview that his reason at that time was that he wanted to practice poligyny (Sund. ngawayuh) but his first wife did not allow him.

When all the requirements are accepted, the KUA will display the names of parties who are planning to marry along with the information as to the time and place of the wedding ceremony on an information board in front of the office. Within these ten days, the couple are recommended to take part in the premarital

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36 There are three penghulu that I interviewed during my fieldwork in three KUA. I will refer it as KUA 1, 2 and 3 in this writing.
information session held by the KUA. I will explain in more detail about this program in the next section.

On the day of the wedding ceremony, the *penghulu* visits the venue, often at the bride’s house, mosque or hall, to record and conclude the marriage. The marriage contract (*ijab* and *qabul* / offer and acceptance) usually takes place between the groom and the bride’s guardian, generally her father, in the presence of two witnesses. The bride is sometimes asked for her consent and the groom’s identity, but sometimes she is not asked, and she may not even be present when the marriage contract takes place; she may wait in a separate room. After concluding the marriage contract, the bride will be seated side by side with the groom and the *penghulu* will give the couple the marriage book to be signed by the couple. The groom, then, is required to read out loud the *shighat taklik talak*\(^{37}\) printed on the last page of the marriage book. A sermon will then be delivered to conclude the wedding ceremony. This sermon contains advice about married life.

The official payment for registering the marriage according to the regulation is 30. 000,- rupiah (eq. AUD $3.00)\(^{38}\). However, in reality, the cost will vary according to the location of the KUA. In urban areas with ‘high’ income residents, the KUA will charge the couple much more than the amount required (approximately around 300.000 to 500. 000 rupiah). Recently, there has been a statement issued from the Minister of Religious Affairs to abolish the payment of marriage registration (Antara News, 2013).

According to the Marriage Law, any marriage that is unregistered is subject to annulment and may even attract a fine from the government. In this case even the person who conducts the marriage may be liable. However, in many areas of Indonesia unregistered marriage is high (Platt, 2010) due to ineffective roles between states and local culture, but also due to inability to pay the fee. Thus,

\(^{37}\) Detail of *shighat taklik talak* is provided in Chapter Two.

\(^{38}\) The Governmental Regulation/Peraturan Pemerintah (PP) Republik Indonesia No. 51 Year 2000 on the Rate of Payment for non-taxable national income in Religious Affairs Department.
while registration is compulsory, it is not universal; as failure to register the marriage is not policed and the sanction stated above is ineffective.

**SUSCATIN: Premarital Information Session**

SUSCATIN is an abbreviation for *Kursus Calon Pengantin* (Premarital Information Course). Originally it was designed as a course given by KUA for the couple requesting to be married. In other KUA this program is also called KBCM, which stands for *Kursus Bimbingan Calon Mempelai* (the premarital guidance course). However, it is more apt to use the term “session” instead of course. This session is based on the regulation issued by Director General of Islamic Community Guidance/Direktur Jenderal Bimas Islam at the Ministry of Religious Affairs No: DJ.II/491 Year 2009. This regulation requires all couples to participate in this session as a requirement before registering their marriage. As proof of their participation, the couple are given a certificate. In reality, many couples skip this session; some are not informed about the session while others have no time to attend.

The aim of this session is to give information to couples about married life. This session is intended to create a married life full of harmony (*sakinah*), love (*mawaddah*), and tenderness (*rahmah*). It also aims to decrease marital disharmony and divorce and to prevent domestic violence. According to the regulation, seven topics covered in this session and the time allocated for each topic is as follows: (1) the administrative procedures of marriage (2 hours); (2) Islamic religious knowledge (5 hours); (3) the governmental regulations on marriage and family matters (4 hours); (4) The rights and duties of husband and wife (5 hours); (5) reproductive health (3 hours); (6) family management (3 hours); (7) marital and family psychology (2 hours). There are 24 hours in total allocated for this program.

This program contributes significantly to the couple’s knowledge about marriage if it is given effectively and according to the regulation stated above, to every
couple. However, not every KUA runs this program in accordance with the regulation. For example, in term of topics, not every topic stated above is covered in the KUA where I conducted an interview. In addition, in terms of time, it often takes only an hour or two to give the session rather than the recommended 24 hours.

Based on information from penghulu in three KUA in my study site, within the ten days service prior to marrying the couple should participate in the premarital information session. These KUA have their own schedule for providing the session, but mostly adapt to the couple’s availability. Most information given in this session is based on Islamic law on marriage in accordance with the Marriage Law and the module given by the Department of Religious Affairs. There are also references from classical Islamic books commonly used in each KUA such as *Kifayat al-Akhyar* (by Taqiyuddin Abu Bakar Bin Muhammad Al-Husaini Al-Hishni) and *I’anat al-Thalibin* (by Sayyid Bakri bin Muhammad Syatha al-Dimyati) for *fiqh* and Hadith compilation book of *Riyad al-shalihin* (by Yahya bin Syaraf al-Din al-Nawawi). These books are popular and widely read in *pesantren* in Indonesia (Van Bruinessen, 1995).

The session will vary in time according to the educational level of the engaged couple. The method employed in this session, according to *penghulu*, is a combination between preaching, sharing and dialogue. For couples from lower educational background, the session will take place over about half an hour. The couple usually just listens to the advice given by *penghulu*. By contrast, couples with higher education actively engage in discussion during the session.

Advice given by *penghulu* in these KUA is related to information on the Islamic etiquette of sexual activity and the duties and rights in marriage. In KUA 2\(^{39}\), the penghulu usually gives advice metaphorically to make it easier for the couple to understand the message, here is an example:

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\(^{39}\) Interviewed on June 6, 2012
Marriage is like buying shoes. You go to the store, choose and buy them based on preference and your financial capacity. After two or three months, you go back to the shoe store and you will see that there are many new and great models available to choose from. That is what marriage is, he explained. Marriage should be based on *ibadah* (religious duty) otherwise you will be disappointed, because after marriage you will find there are many men and women who may be better than your husband or wife. So, you should aim to base your marriage on *ibadah* in order that you are not dissatisfied.

The *penghulu* in KUA 2 also mentioned that there is a duty in marriage to maintain harmony. In marriage, there is no first person or second person; both are equal partners in building a long-lasting marriage. To make this happen they need a willingness to work together and a readiness to forgive one another.

The section in KUA that runs the premarital information session is the BP4 (*Badan Penasihat, Pembinaan dan Pelestarian Perkawinan*, The Advisory Body for Developing and Maintaining marriage). BP4 is a professional organisation affiliated with Department of Religious Affairs to promote the establishment of harmonious marriage. In its first formal establishment in 1960, the abbreviation of BP4 stands for (*Badan Penasihat Perkawinan dan Penyelesaian Perceraian*, The Body of Marriage Counselling and Divorce Settlements). In 2009, BP4 abbreviation was changed to *Badan Penasihat, Pembinaan dan Pelestarian Perkawinan* (The Advisory Body for Developing and Maintaining marriage) after the National meeting of XIV 2009 (Badilag, 2009). This change was made with the stipulation that the KUA was no longer responsible for divorce proceedings.

During in-depth interviews with my primary participants, most women did not attend the pre marital information session. Of forty participants, only seven attended the session while 33 did not. Various reason were given for not attending the session such as working in another city, assumed to have knowledge on the topic (educated), and uninformed about this information session. Several participants who attend pre marital information sessions commented positively saying it provided preliminary information on marriage life. While several others said that the session was ineffective because it was so
short time and used a lecturing method that did not allow question time. Such negative preconceptions were also reported by Boylen (2012) among the couples who participated in pre-marriage education in Australia. He stated that before attending the pre-marriage education the couple already assumed that the session would be dogmatic and doctrinal as it was run by the church. However, after attending the program, they gave positive feedback on the session because it provided comprehensive information on marriage (Boylen, 2012).

It is worth considering the recommendation from one FGD during my fieldwork that the session cover more comprehensive topics and that the KUA collaborate with other governmental department like the Health Department in giving information related to marriage (FGD 1).40

Each KUA allocated time for this session based on the couple’s availability in regard to their working hours and distance. For this reason, the session is sometimes given individually or in groups, depending on how many couples are requesting weddings at the time. The instructor of this session is a penghulu who is also on the board of BP4.

The penghulu from the three KUA interviewed generally believed in equality within marriage. Their role is important in teaching gender equality in married life; hence it is essential for the penghulu to understand gender equality. In considering the importance of the penghulu’s understanding and promoting gender equality during premarital information sessions, Rahima an NGO based in Jakarta concerned with gender equality in Islam, has taken steps to establish a program to train penghulu in Indonesia on gender equality in Islamic marriage41. This program is supported by The Centre for Research and Development of Religious Affairs at The Department of Religious Affairs. This training aims to educate penghulu, instructors and counsellors of BP4 on the promotion of

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40 FGD 1 was conducted among mix-sex Kindergarten teachers on June 9, 2012.

41 There are seven regions participated in this training namely: Sukabumi, Yogyakarta, Bangkalan, Medan, Palembang, Bandar Lampung and Tanjung Pinang (personal communication).
harmonious marriage (*keluarga sakinah*) based on a gender equality perspective (Rahima, 2012 & personal communication).

Considering the regulation on this premarital information session and the source knowledge of marriage and sexuality as outlined in my previous chapter, I would argue that *Suscatin* is an important program for the government in disseminating information on marriage and sexuality. This formal information should be organised in a more serious and comprehensive way involving not only BP4 in KUA but also collaboration with other governmental departments such as the Health Department and Law and Human Right Department, to properly address important issues in marriage.

This chapter concludes that there are various ways for women to find their *jodoh* (soul mate). Some women were able to meet their ideal marriage partner while others were not. Through courtship, women could evaluate the sincerity of their partner allowing them to get to know each other better. For women who had no chance for courtship, for various reasons, they met their partner shortly prior to marriage. In a society where marriage is a social norm, women are persuaded to marry to avoid marginalisation as a result of unfulfilled social expectation. Several women were sacrificing their own interests in consideration of others.

Prior to marriage, the couple need to fulfilled administration procedures of registering the marriage in accordance with the state regulation. An important requirement in entering married life is attending a pre-marital information session provided by KUA. This session is significant in giving preliminary information on marriage for the couple.
Chapter Six
Marital Adjustment and Household Management

This chapter explores the experiences of women during the adjustment period of marriage and how they manage the household. This chapter contains two sections: the first section addresses several adjustments that the women have to deal with in the first stages of marriage, and the second section examines the arrangements made by the couples in managing the household. Included in this section is a discussion of how the women deal with marital conflict and dissolution.

Marriage creates a new reality; and a new family. Both partners need to cooperate with each other and to rely on each other to make this new reality work. Marriage assigns new roles as a wife and a husband, which in turn gives each of them certain rights and responsibilities. Role theory is used in analysing this chapter as a means of “examining the linkages between social organization, culture, and the performances that humans give while engaged in interaction” (Ritzer, 2005, p. 651). In particular sex role theory is significant in analysing marital adjustments and household management. According to this theory each sex is assigned different roles and expected behaviour. Although this theory is criticised for differentiating roles solely based on biological function (Connell, 1987), and limiting the potentialities of individual and the variation of cultural gender experiences (Parker, 1997), it is significant to employ this theory for this chapter. This sex-role theory is useful in analysing gender relations in marriage by adding the linkages with the social institutions, culture and state gender ideology in the Indonesian context.

Marital Adjustment

In my first year of marriage, there were tensions (ketegangan) between us. We felt uncomfortable (kaku) and tense (tegang): we weren’t comfortable with our level of openness (keterbukaan) yet. I
was puzzled (bingung) about how to communicate everything related to our marriage arrangements. We just observed each other silently. (Mala, aged 40)

The quote above is the experience of a woman I interviewed in her first year of marriage. Mala was 29 years old when she married a man of the same age. Both come from a middle class family background, and both had good education and jobs before marriage. This background did not help bring a smooth adjustment in their first year of marriage. Their short period of acquaintance before marriage could have contributed to their uneasiness. Mala had only known her husband for three months prior to her marriage. The tensions had arisen as the date of her wedding day approached, she was beset with increasing uncertainty and fear that she was marrying the wrong person.

Mala’s experience suggests that the two factors that have changed the age of marriage – prolonged education and enhanced employment opportunities, especially for women – do not necessarily affect the adjustment process in the early years of marriage. Rather, I suggest that cultural factors such as family origin upbringing, ethnic background, age, and personality do affect the marriage adjustment process.

**Family Origin and Upbringing**

A difference in the way the family raises the children contributes to the process of adjustment. The family plays a significant role in encouraging certain habits and values that shape one’s behaviour. Some problems may arise if these habits and values are not the same as those of the partner.

Mala (aged 40) experienced this difference. For example, her husband would criticise her for her habit of not wearing sandals whenever she walked on the ground in the back yard or the front yard. She said:

> My husband considered me weird (aneh) and dirty (jorok) because I didn’t wear thongs outside (in the backyard or front house). His family never encouraged him to do so; while in my family having bare feet was
common. I have done that since I was a little girl when I played with my friends.

Other women also shared this difficulty in adjusting to their husband’s habits. Nanda (aged 36) and her husband had different styles of upbring. Nanda was brought up in a religious family which was very concerned with the behaviour and attitudes of the children, including how to dress. However, her husband comes from a musician’s family that was more relaxed in their behaviour, especially in relation to appearance and dress code: he had long hair and often wore untidy clothes. Her family did not even give their permission for her to marry him. These differences negatively affected Nanda’s adjustment in her marriage.

When the habits and values of the family of origin coincide with the partner’s expectation of how one should behave, there will generally not be tension between the couple. On the contrary, when the habits and values of one’s natal family are different, it may be problematic and lead to marital conflict. To guard against this, couples come to certain agreements. For example Ani (aged 45) said:

My husband and I are different in several aspects: I am concerned with education whereas my husband is interested in music; my husband never has breakfast while I always have breakfast in the morning; my husband always prays (shalat) on time while I usually can’t be bothered doing that.

Ani and her husband made several adjustments to overcome these differences: Ani’s husband changed his breakfast habits, so that he eats breakfast every morning; and Ani follows her husband’s schedule of praying on time.

**Ethnic Background**

Many Sundanese prefer to marry someone from the same ethnic background in order that they can adapt easily. In practice, however, couples of the same ethnicity can also have different habits and social manners. Sandra (aged 57), for example, married a man of her neighbouring district. Both are Sundanese, but
Sandra mentioned that when she first visited her husband’s family after her wedding day, she felt disturbed by their manners (tata krama). For example, her husband’s family talked to her in a language that she considered coarse and inappropriate (tidak sopan). After a while, she understood that it was their custom and had nothing to do with them looking down on her. On the contrary, her husband’s family welcomed her with open arms and showed their affection for her.

Sundanese women who married someone from a different ethnic background, such as a Batak, Minang or Acehnese, said that they needed to learn and familiarise themselves with these differences. There are also stereotypical presumptions about certain ethnic groups. Sinta (aged, 40) complained about the way her husband, who is Batak, talked. Batak are said to have a louder tone of voice and a hot temper, while Sundanese have a softer character. At first, she felt unhappy and could not accept this difference, but after a while she managed to accept it.

A rather different story of adaptation was told by Mira (aged 50), who married an Acehnese man. She had no difficulty in adapting to Acehnese custom. In fact, she is one of her mother-in-law’s favourites. She has the ability to mingle with her husband’s family and gain sympathy from them. She suggests, “Do not be afraid of ethnic differences in marriage. All you need to do is to show your good behaviour to your husband’s family and know how to adapt intelligently.”

Age, Class, and Education Gap

In Indonesia, as reported by Situmorang (2011), women tend to marry up in terms of age, class and education. These differences affect women’s adjustment in their marriage. A big gap in age, class and educational background can be difficult for women; if they are younger, and feel inferior to their husband, it can be difficult for them to convey their opinion. In this case, the role of the husband is significant in bridging this gap. Several of the women interviewed have difficulty in coping with these differences in their marriage.
Twelve of the women that I interviewed had a very large age gap with their husband (between 6 and 12 years). Dian (aged 23) said:

In the first year of my marriage there was social and educational inequality between us. I felt inferior (minder) in front of my husband and my husband’s friends. I have been to university but only up to second semester, while my husband has a Masters degree and is a civil servant.

There was also a big gap in terms of age: Dian is 20 years of age while her husband is 29. During this first year, conflicts often occurred: Dian gets easily upset (mudah tersinggung) if something unpleasant occurs between them. Conflict often occurred in the first year and a half of their marriage. In their second year, the couple managed to try and talk about their relationship, to rectify their mistakes toward each other and to be better people.

**Personality**

One of the biggest challenges in marital adjustment is dealing with a partner’s personality. Every individual has a different and unique personality. Common expressions from women I interviewed were: “It is difficult to unite two heads (menyatukan dua kepala itu susah banget)” (Tia) and “Different head, different opinion (beda kepala, beda pemikiran)” (Hera). It seems to be important to have someone who will give in (mengalah) – either wife or husband. However, when both have a persistent and domineering character, it is quite difficult for them to adjust. Hera (aged 28) indicated that:

In the early years of marriage, we often had fights, especially about my husband’s attitudes. Sometimes, my husband did not agree with what I wanted. On the other hand, I wanted him to change to be a better person. Maybe because we are both the youngest in our families we always insisted that we were right and were inconsiderate of the other. However, my husband usually cedes to my opinion.

Sofi (aged 39) also found it difficult to adjust to her husband’s personality in her first three months of marriage. She said: “He seldom spoke; he did not work; and
he did not pray and fast. This triggered fights between us but I always gave in to
what he wanted. I am trying to be an obedient wife.”

Managing the Household

Only after I got pregnant with my first child did I have the courage
to communicate with my husband on how we would manage the
household. The first thing we discussed was matters related to the
wellbeing of the baby like the cost of the delivery, clothes, and
food. Since then we have openly shared and discuss everything
related to managing the household. That includes negotiating our
roles in housework. (Mala aged 40)

Gender and Sex Roles

Marriage signifies the recognition of the role of the couple in society and nation,
each component of which is specified according to gender. The Indonesian
Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974, alongside New Order gender ideology, has clearly
mapped out the household arrangement based on gender roles.

In practice, although there are variations in household management in Indonesia,
the primary responsibility of women as the main household managers is almost
universally prescribed. Even in families where women also contribute to the
household income, women felt (and are expected to be) responsible for
household affairs.

Most couples are aware of their respective expected roles when entering married
life: that is, that the wife’s duty is to manage the household while the husband is
obliged to provide financial support. These internalised expected roles will have
an immediate effect when a couple enters married life, unless an alternative
agreement is made between the couple before the marriage. Several women I
interviewed directly conform to this ascribed role, as wives who serve their
husbands and manage the household. Many who worked before marriage gave
up their jobs to stay at home to be an ideal wife. Although among my

42 Especially provided in chapter VI, article 31 as previously stated.
participants only eight considered themselves to be fulltime housewives, and 34 others participate in paid work, they all considered serving their husbands, doing housework and child rearing to be their main job.

For example Nanda (aged 36) and Tia (aged 36) quit their job prior to getting married. However, Tia (aged 36) found that staying in the house all day was boring and a waste of time. She said:

   Since marrying I quit my job as a teacher and moved to a new place where my husband works. I was bored being at home all day. I told my husband that I wanted to apply for a job at his workplace, but he didn’t allow it. So, I tried to find another job, and I was lucky to meet a friend who helped me establish a school for early learning. Since then, I have been teaching and dedicating myself to the development of this school.

In her first year of marriage, Sandra (aged 57) was also anxious that her marriage would not be in accordance with her expectations. Her husband was busy with his own studies while she was left alone doing housework: providing for his needs and rearing the children. She felt like she was his servant not his wife, especially when her husband left her to pursue his studies overseas. She kept wondering why he did this. Later, when her husband finished his study she realised that he had wanted to focus on his study and did not want to be disturbed. Once he obtained his degree, he paid attention to her and his children, although he still did not participate in housework. They had already assigned their roles: as she noted, she considers herself ‘the home affairs minister’ and her husband ‘the foreign minister’.

Thus, the above-mentioned experiences of my participants suggest that while the majority of women conformed to their role as wife, they resisted being the guardian of the household and negotiated to actualise themselves by taking up various occupations in the public sphere.
Housework Negotiation

In Indonesia, domestic work is believed to be the main job of the wife. Women contributing to the family income through paid work have to work extra hard: in addition to paid work, they have to serve their husbands, clean the house and care for the children. Assistance from the husband is important in the distribution of work around the home. Although several of the respondents were able to negotiate their position, it is unlikely to be easy.

Mala (aged 40) argued “it was necessary for me to bargain with my husband about who does what around the home.” She says that it was not easy and took some time to finally reach an agreement. Her husband was a much beloved son who had never done any housework. It was hard for her to tell him to contribute on a daily basis and he was initially reluctant. However, Mala kept telling him the necessity of his involvement and taught him what she needed him to do. Nowadays, when they get home to find the house untidy, it is the job of whoever is less tired, not necessarily Mala, to do the work. A further challenge came from her mother-in-law, who objected to seeing her son do housework. Her husband then explained to his natal family about household arrangements in his marriage until they could understand and respect it.

Like Mala’s husband, Edah’s husband was raised in a family that assumed that housework is women’s work. In her marriage, it was always Edah (aged 43) who was busy working around the house, especially when her first baby was born. Dissatisfied with this situation, Edah told her husband that building a marriage required two people, not one, so it was unfair if she did all the work. She started asking for his participation whenever she was cleaning the house or caring for the baby. She said it was more helpful for her to ask her husband to help her while she was doing the housework rather than telling him to do the job. In the end, her husband got used to doing these jobs by himself whenever she was absent, tired or sick. The greatest challenge, as experienced by Mala, was the
objection from the mother-in-law who protested (*tidak rela*) that her son was doing ‘women’s work’.

There are also several other husbands of interviewees who had gotten used to doing housework, and would routinely participate in daily chores. Ani (aged 45) mentions that her husband was skillful in cooking and sewing. Halimah (aged 31) also said that she and her husband do the housework together. Whenever she woke up late in the morning, her husband would have already washed the dishes and clothes. He used to sweep and mop the floor. During her first pregnancy, when Halimah had to have bed rest, her husband would do all the housework. Although, she noted, during this time her husband often broke glasses while washing. But she would ignore this matter and thank her husband for helping her.

However, the majority of the women in this study noted that their husbands still assume that housework is the wife’s work. Their participation in the housework is still low compared to wives’ significant participation in paid work. Women are still predominantly responsible for the housework. Many women also would not label this as inequality, as they believe that housework is their main duty. The husband’s participation in housework in many cases is necessary because the wife does other (paid) work. Women’s education and participation as income earners does not seem to contribute significantly to equal gender relations in marriage. Many women and men in Indonesia would argue that it is fine to be a career woman as long as the household affairs are not neglected.

*Household Finances*

Managing the household finances was also quite an issue among several women I interviewed. Mala (aged 40) for example, said she and her husband earned their own salaries but both still kept it for themselves after married. Mala used her own money for her daily expenses and her husband did the same. This stand-off continued for about one year until their first child arrived. Since then they have
started discussing everything related to their household affairs, as indicated in the quotation at the beginning of this section.

In certain cases, where family income was insufficient due to the husband’s unemployment or unstable income, wives decided to take side jobs in order to contribute. In fact, many wives contributed significantly to the household income; they would find alternative jobs as a backup income whenever their husbands failed to perform their role as provider. From forty respondents, only eight could be considered ‘real’ housewives, while thirty-two others took various jobs, with many even working several jobs a day. For example, in addition to working as teachers, Iis (aged 40) and Sinta (aged 40) would take other jobs such as working in the rice field, cooking for other families or cleaning other families’ houses.

Acih is also an example of a wife who has played the role of economic provider throughout her marriage, as well as caring for the family. Her husband has no stable job and is often unemployed for long periods. Acih tries to find her own income source for her daily needs, mostly by finding firewood in the forest or weeding her neighbour’s garden. Compared to her husband, she is a hard worker. Her burden has been even heavier due to her continuous pregnancies (12 during the marriage) and the domestic violence in her marriage. She mentioned that she often had to work in the garden while she was heavily pregnant and had to carry her other baby on her back. The husband’s lack of commitment in his role as economic provider imposed upon his wife the dual – and often simultaneous - burden of nurturing and income earning.

Uum (aged 35) had a similar experience, with a husband who has never given her financial support. After marriage, Uum quit her job as a teacher and stayed in her husband’s parents’ house. Her husband had no stable employment and often left Uum for long periods of four to six months. During his absence, he left her without sufficient financial support. Uum had to support herself and her
daughters. She would work in the rice field or help her in-laws in managing mosque activities.

Many cases showed that women’s participation in paid work is not usually accompanied by men’s participation in housework and child rearing. This situation leaves women working a double-shift: outside and inside the house. Hochschild (1989) described this phenomenon in her studies of men and women’s contribution to family life in America. She reported that the majority of men do not share domestic work, meaning that women work longer hours than men. For women who work in paid labour, this means working double shifts: “one shift at the office or factory and a ‘second shift’ at home (p. 4).” Hochschild noted that these double shifts had resulted in women being physically tired, getting easily upset, and feeling anxious, all of which influence the quality of marital relationships. The double-shift experienced by my informants requires women’s physical and emotional stability. Many women said that they have to be physically strong as they have many things to do around the house.

Marital Conflict and Marital Dissolution

Adjustments are important within marriage, and through this process problems that can potentially trigger conflict may appear. The couple’s failure to resolve the problems, may lead to marital disruption, separation or divorce.

Among the 42 women I interviewed, five are divorced, four are widowed and one is separated from her partner. The third category fits with the description given by Hull (2011) of one type of marital disruption: separate residence, not in a relationship together, and where one of the spouses is engaged in another relationship. In my example, the woman still shares a house with her husband, but she is no longer in a relationship with her husband because he has another relationship. Three women are remarried: one remarried her former husband; the other two are married to other men and one of them has been married five times. Three of the widowed and divorced women stated that they do not think about
remarriage, and one of them has been a widow for 18 years. The widow’s
decision not to remarry is to show loyalty to her former husband (Zuidberg, 1978;
cf. Idrus, 2011) and dedication to the wellbeing of the children.

This section explores marital disruption experienced by the women, and is
divided into two parts. The first part discusses conflicts that emerged in the
women’s marriage and how, and if, they managed to resolve them. The second
part examines divorce cases and the stigma attached to women following
divorce.

**Conflict**

Many women I interviewed were aware that marriage is not always about
happiness. Unhappiness, as they describe it, is where a problem presents itself
and leads to possible conflict with the husband. Marital conflict can be classified
into various categories, according to the respondents: infidelity, economic
difficulty, outsider interference, domestic violence, abandonment and
childlessness. Conflict occurring in marriage is not necessarily the result of a
single cause. The women identified multiple causes of conflict, as categorised
above. For example, some women I interviewed experienced conflict because of
their husband’s infidelity, lack of responsibility and continuously abusive
behaviour. Couples who face these conflicts do not necessarily end up divorcing.
Many couples were able to resolve their marital conflicts and manage to be
considerate of their spouse’s expectations and achieve mutual understanding,
while others decided to terminate the marriage.

Infidelity is the most common cause of conflict between spouses, based on
women’s experience. Eight of my respondents said the conflict began when their
husbands had affairs with other women or wanted to take another wife. Four of
the women decided to get divorced because of their husband’s infidelity, two
others resolved the problem and the other two are still negotiating.
Iis (aged 40) for example, managed to resolve the problem caused by her husband’s affair. When she accidentally discovered his affair, Iis called the woman asking her to end the relationship and explaining to her that her husband was already married with children. The woman told Iis that she did not know and apologised to her. Similarly, Acih (aged 49) found out, after one year of marriage, that her husband already had a wife who lives in another province. She was angry at the time and left her husband for a month. But then she went back to her marriage and accepted her husband’s status. Three of my respondents found out after about one year of marriage that their husbands were already married. This phenomenon, where husbands hide or falsify their marital status, is common in Indonesia.

Nisa (aged 37) has a different story. The conflict between her and her husband began when her husband insisted on practising polygyny. Nisa refused to accept it. Her husband tried to force his opinion on her and provided her with some religious readings that support polygyny. Her husband even gave her an ultimatum: if, within a certain period, she did not permit him to take another wife, he would divorce her. After interviewing Nisa, I provided her with alternative readings on polygyny that differ from those of her husband, to give her balanced information concerning polygyny in Islam.

Ilah (aged 59) and her husband have been separated for almost six years. It all started when her husband had an affair with another married woman from the same village. This affair was publicly known and people felt pity for Ilah. Ilah felt sad, embarrassed and helpless. Since the affair, her husband has not given Ilah and her children any financial support. They still live in their small house together with their married daughter, but they do not talk to each other. Ilah’s husband wants to divorce her, but Ilah does not want to. The reason is that if her husband divorces her, he will sell the house, which will mean that she and her married daughter will have nowhere to live. Divorce is not an option for her but a reunion is also unlikely.
Many conflicts in marriage also result from economic difficulties as a result of husbands who fail to play their role as income earner. For example, Rani (aged 43) and Sinta (aged 40) have similar experiences. Since they got married, Rani’s husband has not had a stable job and they often fight over it. Nowadays, because her husband has a stable job their marriage is more harmonious.

Sinta and her husband, who also does not have a stable job, often fight over money. According to Sinta, her husband does not try hard enough to find work and is too picky. Meanwhile, Sinta always takes any available jobs in the neighbourhood. Her husband often asks her for money or borrows from a neighbour to run his own business, but he cannot manage it wisely and is often in debt. Once her husband got very angry when he asked her for some money and she did not give it to him because she did not have it. She told her husband to find it himself. Her husband then threw a helmet at her. She was shocked and frightened because she was not expecting such a reaction. She then returned to her father’s house because she was afraid that her husband would try to harm her again. Her father stepped in and confronted Sinta’s husband, advising him to stop being violent toward his daughter.

Childlessness can also trigger conflict between a couple. Tia (aged 36) has been married for twelve years and they still do not have any children. They have argued a lot about the reasons, with Tia finally consulting a doctor after getting pressure from her husband.

Interference from outsiders can also create marital tension. Outsiders may include immediate family like parents, parents-in-law, extended family and even neighbours. These outsiders may interfere in matters such as household affairs, or may provoke conflict between the spouses. Maya (aged 41) and Siti (aged 40) have different strategies in countering outsiders’ meddling. Maya prefers to fix the problem right away, while Siti would rather ignore interference from her husband’s family. She tries not to be provoked because she feels that might create further conflict.
Women tend to keep their marital conflicts to themselves. They try to resolve the issues by themselves without involving others. They were told by their mothers that they should not talk about all their marital problems outside the house and endeavour to solve the problem themselves. However, if the problem becomes too complicated and they cannot handle it, they might ask their parents to step in and help. During the interviews, several women who felt that their marriages were in trouble asked my advice about how to resolve their problems. They wrongly assumed I was a marriage counsellor. I suggested that they could go to the KUA (Religious Affairs Office) to ask for marital advice. I was informed by one of the marriage registrars that KUA in association with BP4 (Badan Penasehat, Pembinaan dan Pelestarian Perkawinan, The Advisory Body for Developing and Maintaining Marriage) deals with marital complaints.

**Divorce**

Many researchers have reported that divorce in West Java is high (McDonald and Abdurrahman 1974; Horikoshi, 1976; Jones et al., 1994; Jones, 2001). Until recently, divorce in West Java remained the trend as the data shows increasing divorce cases in the Religious Court of Bandung city from 5134 in 2013 to 3440 in 2014 (Nurmila, 2007; Pengadilan Agama Kota Bandung, 2014).

In contrast, for the women I interviewed, divorce is unlikely to be their choice, even when they know their husbands are having an affair, have another wife or are violent. O’Shaughnessy (2007, p. 77) has reported that the “discourse of shame” constructed by the state towards divorce has made it an unfavorable option (for women).

Nisa (aged 37) for example, whose husband insists on being polygynous, told me that:

I do not want to get divorced, but I also do not want my husband to practise polygamy. I am not ready yet. But my husband is forcing me to agree to his decision. He has given me some time to think about it, but he said that if I still could not give him permission by a certain time, he
might divorce me. Being divorced would not guarantee my circumstances would improve.

Ita (aged 59) also said that:

I actually wouldn’t mind my husband having another wife, as long as he asked my permission first. I do not want to get divorced, because I am concerned about the possible impact on my youngest daughter’s psychological state, her position at school and also our social and career status. In fact, my husband has already taken another wife secretly and his new wife is insisting that he divorce me.

Equally significantly, however, two women stated that they would prefer to be divorced than to stay in the marriage when they found out that their husband had had an affair with another woman or was violent.

Iis (aged 40) said:

I want to get divorced from my husband because of his violent behaviour in my marriage, and I have had enough. But my husband does not want this to happen. On the other side, there is no sign from him that he is becoming a better person.

Minah (aged 50) also said that when she found out that her husband was having an affair, she asked directly for a divorce. She said she found out where the woman lived, and then when she caught the husband there she said to the woman, “I am here not to fight over my husband or to take him back. You can have him. I am here just to ask my husband to divorce me.” A similar thing happened to Nanda (aged 36), who asked for a divorce from her husband when she found out that her husband had an affair and the woman got pregnant from this affair.

The factors classified as reasons for divorce may vary across the region in West Java. Previous researchers have reported that common reasons for divorce were husband’s irresponsible behaviour such as alcoholism and gambling in Indramayu (Jones et. al., 1994), economic difficulty in Sumedang (Jones et al., 1994) and Garut (Horikoshi, 1976), marital disharmony in Serpong (Zuidberg, 1978), infidelity (or poligyny) (Nurmila, 2009; Platt, 2011), infertility and subfecundity in the highlands of Bandung (McDonald & Abdurrahman, 1974). For
the women I interviewed, the most frequent factors causing divorce were infidelity, polygyny, desertion, and the husband’s unstable emotional and psychological character.

However, even following divorce, several women were unhappy, disappointed and even in distress as described in the following divorce cases:

**Ita (aged 59): “between love, humiliation and anger”**

Sometimes I feel empty and disappointed knowing that 30 years of marriage had no meaning for him (as he) turned to another woman. There are uncertain feelings inside me – between love, humiliation and anger – after divorce.

Ita was married for 30 years and has five children. The conflict started when her husband took another wife secretly (*nikah siri*)43. In fact, Ita would not have opposed her husband taking another wife but she did wish he’d asked her permission first. She felt like he had completely ignored her existence. In the end, her husband’s second wife forced him to divorce Ita if he wanted to continue with the marriage and Ita’s husband agreed. Ita’s husband was strategic in how he went about dissolving the marriage in order that the divorce would be initiated by Ita: he did not go home for long periods and abandoned his family. But Ita was also quick to realise what was going on and did not react: she did not

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43*Nikah siri* is a marriage conducted by the couple secretly and without government registration. *Siri* is taken from the Arabic siriun-siri, meaning secret. In Indonesia, *nikah siri* is common with different terms used to indicate this kind of marriage like *nikah bawah tangan* (underhand marriage), *nikah syiri* (Iswarini, 2011, p. 74), or *kawin liar* (wild marriage) (Idrus, 2011). In *nikah siri*, the couple fail to fulfill one or several of the requirements for a valid marriage, such as having a guardian (*wali*) or witness. In fact, *nikah siri* is risky for women, both socially and legally. The couple who perform *nikah siri* is subject to gossip, and legally a woman cannot claim the rights she is entitled to within marriage, e.g. it will be difficult to obtain documents such as birth certificate for children born from this marriage. Surprisingly, many people consider it as *nikah secara agama* (religiously accepted). It should be differentiated between *nikah siri* and *nikah secara agama*. *Nikah secara agama* does not violate requirement stipulated for a valid marriage, it just not registered while *nikah siri* violate the requirement needed for valid marriage. For example some poor people choose to keep their marriage unregistered due to the expense of registration but not necessarily secret, although they may fulfill all the requirements needed for valid marriage. They would happily participate if KUA or certain social organisations provide *nikah massal* (mass wedding) where they could register their marriage for free.
complain or make a fuss about his absence. She recognised that if she was the one who initiated the divorce, she would not be entitled to post-divorce spouse-and-children support from the husband. And her husband wanted this to happen.

In 2009, her husband finally lodged the application for divorce to the Court. In the end, although divorce was not her choice, and she felt betrayed by her husband, she felt better: “since my divorce, I feel more relaxed and no longer afraid” However, Ita often wonders how her husband could divorce her after 30 years together and turn to another woman he had just met. After the divorce, Ita was entitled to the house and several properties they had acquired during the marriage, as compensation because her husband refused to give her alimony and child support.

_Uum (aged 35): entangled_

Uum’s marital conflict began when she had a six month old baby and her husband left them for several months. Later she found out that her husband already had a wife before marrying her. She said that if her child had been a boy, she would have asked for a divorce right away. But, because she had a daughter, she stayed in her polygynous marriage for the sake of her daughter. In fact, she dared to visit her husband’s first wife and introduce herself as his second wife and the first wife accepted her. But the conflict did not end; her husband often abandoned her for long periods, giving her no financial support for up to six months. Whenever he was around, he limited her movements, abused her and then left her for further months on end. This happened repeatedly, because every time he returned to her he promised her all kinds of things, which she believed, and accepted him again. They subsequently had three daughters, until her mother stepped in and brought Uum home and asked her to get divorced.

Another problem is that Uum married her husband secretly and their marriage was not registered (nikah siri), thus she has no documentation that she ever married her husband. It was difficult for her to ask for a divorce because her husband not only refused to divorce her, but was also hard to locate. Uum then
asked her husband’s elder brother to witness and sign, on behalf of her husband, the letter that she wrote concerning the divorce. She returned the ring that had been used as a bride price (khulu’) to her husband’s brother. Her husband’s brother promised to take responsibility for the divorce process.

Nanda (aged 36): acquiescent

Nanda married her husband without the blessing of her family. Her parents already noted the differences between them, particularly the large age gap (18 years) and differing family backgrounds. Her husband worked in music production where, according to her family, it is very easy for a man to have an affair. However, Nanda ignored the warnings given by her family and insisted on marrying him. After several years of marriage, her husband indeed had an affair with another woman in his workplace and the conflict began. He seldom came home, stopped giving her financial support and neglected the children. Nanda, who at first wanted to become a housewife, was forced to support herself and her twin daughters. She took whatever jobs were available to prevent her children from having to quit school.

Then one day her husband came to her in tears and told her that the woman he had had an affair with was pregnant and had asked him to marry her. Nanda was upset and slapped her husband. Her husband asked her forgiveness for his mistake, he even kissed her feet. Nanda said to her husband: “alright, marry her and divorce me.” Her husband then divorced Nanda once (revocable). Her family wanted her to ask for a third divorce (irrevocable) for what he had done to her. But Nanda did not agree; she explained that her decision was for the sake of her daughters, as they will need their father’s guardianship later when they are married. Nanda and her husband, who had already divorced his second wife, remarried in 2010 and again her decision was opposed by her family.
Sofi (aged 39): confused

Sofi divorced from her husband after only a very short period of marriage: three months. She told me that her three-month marriage was disastrous. She was forced by her parents to marry because she was 34 at that time. Her uncle introduced her to a previously drug-addicted man. Although Sofi was unsure about marrying someone unfamiliar, she accepted the proposal and got married to him. Before getting married, she told her prospective husband that she wanted to continue teaching after marriage and he agreed to this. After marrying, Sofi moved to her husband’s residence and from that time the conflict began. Her husband did not allow her to work as he had agreed, but he himself was not working; his parents subsidised all his daily needs. Furthermore, Sofi noted that her husband had an unstable emotional character and Sofi suspected that this was the result of his previous heavy drug addiction.

In the third month of their marriage, her husband divorced her while she was pregnant with their first child. Sofi was shocked because she was not ready for divorce, especially when she was pregnant. She was in so much distress that it affected her pregnancy. She experienced serious bleeding and lost her baby.

Much research about the dissolution of marriage in Indonesia focuses only on divorce cases and not widowhood. Widowhood is overlooked in the study of marriage and divorce.

Four women among my respondents are widowed. One of them, Tuti (aged 55), has been a widow for about 18 years. She said that she was focused on taking care of her children and has not considered remarrying. Another woman (Lela, aged 65) said that when her husband died she felt that he abandoned her because he died too soon, when she still needed him. Feelings of loss, sadness and uncertainty were experienced by women after their husbands died.

ANI (aged 45) has been a widow for two years. After seven years of marriage, her husband died from a serious illness. She grieved deeply for the loss of her husband because she only realised after he left how much she loved him. After he
died, Ani bought and read many books on topics related to death to find out about the afterlife. Ani never stopped praying (berdoa) for him. She believed that if she prayed regularly he would visit her in her dreams. She told me that she often sees her husband in her dreams. Only recently has she been able to start her activities again. However, she said that not many people in her workplace know that her husband has passed away. She only informed her close friends. She said that this is to avoid gossip concerning her status, because she would feel unsafe revealing her current status as a widow. Feeling unsafe and subject to gossip was also experienced by divorced women, because Indonesian society stigmatises janda (divorcee and widows).

**Stigma**

One of the social impacts of being janda (divorcee and widow) is social marginalisation. Marriage in Indonesia is an ideal social norm and the breakdown of marriage is considered pitiable and troubling. Janda are usually a target of gossip in the neighbourhood and suspected of sexual availability because they have experienced sex and are assumed to want to experience it again. Other married women fear that they might steal their husbands and janda are also targeted by ‘naughty’ husbands and young men who want to experience sex. In this case, the janda is perceived as a threat toward the equilibrium of married life and society, and stigma is attached to being janda. However, the stigma is only experienced by women and not men. Thus, the stigmatisation of janda in Indonesia is a gendered, moral experience (Parker, Riyani, & Nolan, 2015).

Citra (aged 50) noted:

> When my husband passed away, one of the senior male lecturers in my workplace advised me to remarry soon to avoid gossip among my workmates.

Uum (aged 35) said that her friends became suspicious about her sexual life after divorce:
I swear to God (deni Allah), I never have illicit sex. I never even have time to think about it. I am busy with my life. My focus right now is caring for my daughters and studying hard. I do not want to make the same mistake again and to experience failure again in my study and my marriage. So, I am working hard to achieve a better life for my future.

Sofi (aged 39) also stated:

Being a divorcée is uncomfortable. No matter how good my behaviour is, people always suspect me, because I attract men. Married men often harass me and ask me to have affairs. Even married women in my neighbourhood often make unpleasant comments about me. Sometimes I just ignore them but sometimes I am just sick and tired of all these comments.

Many researchers also note that the high rate of divorce in West Java is followed by a high rate of remarriage (McDonald & Abdurrahman, 1974; Jones et al., 1994). It is worth noting that this high rate of remarriage could relate to the stigmatisation of the status of divorcees/widows. Van Bruinessen (1988) whose research addresses some of the poorest urban migrants in Bandung suggests that the demand for remarriage is most likely due to concern for women’s reputation, rather than for economic reasons. Remarriage re-establishes one’s position in the community as a respectable woman.

The status of janda is located beyond the normal category of married life. Thus many janda try to find a strategy to gain this “normalcy” (Wieringa, 2012, p. 518) and re-establish their position in the society as respectable women by becoming dedicated mothers and devoted Muslims. Several divorcees and widows in my research did not think of remarrying but rather focused on caring for their children and their education. Diah (aged 45) said: “It is not easy to find a man who would accept me as a complete package: love me and at the same time love my children. So, I work hard to provide a better education for my children.”

Another strategy to reclaim respectability and remove the stigma of being a janda is by regularly participating in religious gatherings (pengajian) to create a social network and increase religious knowledge.
Lela (aged 65, widow) said:

When my husband died, I started going from one pengajian to another. I didn’t want to just stay at home all alone. Here (at pengajian) I can meet my friends, talk to them and increase my spiritual knowledge.

To sum up, this chapter has provided a discussion of women’s experiences of marital adjustment and household management. There are significant differences between individuals in how each person manages their daily life in marriage. In terms of adjustment experienced by my participants, cultural differences are the main factors in this process. There also seems to be a significant positive correlation between ease of adjustment and the length of the period of courtship, and between ease of adjustment and ease of communication. However, women also need a communication strategy to convey messages to their husbands effectively. This strategy is important especially in managing the household and arranging domestic work between the couple. Cooperation between the couple in managing the household is important and could affect the longevity of married life and minimise marital disruption.

Marital disruption experienced by women in my study has resulted from various factors such as infidelity, economic difficulty, outsider interference, domestic violence, abandonment and childlessness. Several women managed to resolve these problems while several others end up in divorce. In my study, avoidance of divorce is strong due to the stigma attached to being janda.
Chapter Seven
Women’s Experiences of Marital Sexual Relationships: Sex as Duty

If it [intercourse] was not my duty, I would be lazy (*malas*) about it. (Rosa, aged 44)

This chapter explores women’s experiences of marital sexual relationships with their husbands. This chapter is discussed within the construction of female sexuality in Indonesia. The ideal femininity of married women requires them to control their desire and not to show interest in sex, to be passive and submissive to their husband. The asymmetric relationship in marriage between wife and husband, as stated in Indonesian Marriage Law no. 1/1974 and strengthened by religious prescription, has influenced sexual relations. Many women (and men alike) believe that sex in marriage is a woman’s duty and man’s right.

This chapter demonstrates the expected role of a woman’s sexual relations in marriage as submissive to her husband’s sexual desires, and confirms it as a woman’s duty rather than her right. The unique and diverse experiences among individual participants should be taken into account and thus the description might differ from the experiences of Muslim married women in other regions in West Java or in Indonesia in general. As a result, this representation is context-specific and the experiences are not necessarily generalisable.

The data in this chapter are analysed within the context of heterosexual relationships exploring married women’s desire and how society and religion construct women’s sexuality. The theory of scripts, adopted from Simon and Gagnon (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Gagnon, 1977; Simon & Gagnon, 1984) is useful to indicate how social behaviour follows certain scripts which guide one’s action in a specific time and context (Gagnon, 1977). In this thesis, the theory of scripts is useful to analyse the ways that women’s marital sexual behaviours are guided by certain sexual scripts, governed by the state (regional and national government) through its laws; by cultural discourse (particularly in the Sundanese cultural
context) and by religious teachings (specifically, Islam). This shared meaning of sexual behaviour is spread through family, school, religion, media and many other institutions which influence individual personal relationships (Simon & Gagnon, 1984).

This chapter begins by exploring women’s experiences in the initiation of sex on the wedding night and women’s perception of sex in marriage as duty. This chapter also discusses the sexual violence experienced by my participants and how they have coped with this violence.

**Sexual Initiation and Perceived Sexual Role**

*The ‘First Night’ (Malam Pertama): Between Fear, Shame and Desire*

In a discussion of women’s marital sexual relations, it is worth starting from their initiation into having sex on *malam pertama* (lit. first night). *Malam pertama* is the night following the wedding day, when the couple is expected to have intercourse for the first time.

In Indonesia, with its predominantly Muslim population, sex is understood as an act restricted to marriage. Promiscuous sex is unacceptable, and illicit sexual behaviour is stigmatised. Men and women are expected to be virgins on the wedding night, however, more pressure on virginity is directed toward women than men. In Indonesia, information about sex and sexuality is not widely available. Consequently, women have limited, if any, information concerning sex and sexuality prior to marriage. To a certain extent this affects their sexual interaction with their husbands, especially in the initiation into intercourse on the first night. Many women experience fear and anxiety about what will happen to them on that night. Many were informed that the first night would be painful for them. However, for men the wedding night is depicted as something that will be enjoyable.

During *malam pertama* the newly-wed couple will have their first experience of sexual intercourse, or at least are expected to. However, several of my informants
preferred to delay this first sexual experience, for several days, weeks or even months after the wedding, due to their fear and anxiety at not knowing what to expect. Others felt obliged to submit to their husbands in the name of fulfilling what they perceived as their ‘duty’.

Yuni (aged 39; aged 30 at first marriage) said:

The first night knocked me out for so many reasons: I was so tired because of the wedding reception all day, it made me feel weak, my face was pale and what’s more, I was informed by my friends that the first night could be painful. These conditions stressed me. I was scared. We did not have sex that night as my husband also panicked, seeing my condition.

Mala (aged 40; aged 29 at first marriage) also mentioned:

During our first night, there was stiffness (kaku) between us. We just stared at each other silently and did not do anything. I was scared and shy. We fell asleep exhausted that night. When I woke up the next morning, I was surprised to see that I was sleeping with someone else. I felt scared. Then I realised that he is my husband now.

These feelings of fear, shame and anxiety about the first night leave little room for a woman to explore her sexual desires or to focus on her sexual pleasure.

Several women suggested that they preferred to delay their sexual initiation for days because of this anxious feeling and unreadiness.

Dian (aged 23; aged 20 at first marriage) said:

On the first night I was scared and my body was shaking. A thought came to my mind at that time: what is my husband going to do with me? Because of that feeling, I did not have sex with him for two weeks after the wedding. I also did not have any information about the first night, what I should do or what might happen that night. However, after two weeks I did it, even though I was still unsure, I did it because I felt pity (kasihan) for my husband.

Wiwi (aged 47; aged 15 at first marriage) had a similar experience, and only had sex with her husband two weeks after their wedding. She said:
I felt scared that night. That was why I did not have sex with my husband for about two weeks. After that, I realised that I was married to him legally so it was all right to have sex with him. I knew nothing about it, my husband guided me. I was scared but happy.

She mentioned that her husband guided her in her first sexual intercourse, because her husband had been married before and therefore had already experienced sex. However, she informed me that she only found out that her husband had been previously married after one year of marriage. She was disappointed but in the end accepted the way things were (pasrah).

Minah (aged 50; aged 13 at first marriage) described her first experience of intercourse as shocking. She was married off by her parents at 13, to a man 6 years older than her, and after only one week’s acquaintance. Minah did not immediately live with her husband after their marriage. Two months later, her husband moved in to her parents’ house and from that time she had sexual intercourse with him. She described it as “creepy (murinding) and shocking (gingiapeun).”

Some husbands comply with their wives’ disinclination to sexual initiation and understandably delay sexual intercourse on the wedding night. Others forcibly demand their wives have sex on this first night. Eha (aged 29; aged 17 at first marriage) said that: “My first night was painful, because my husband wanted to do it again and again.” She hesitated to say no to this unpleasant first experience of sex. Acih (aged 49) also experienced forced sex on the first night. At the time, she was only 13 and had not even experienced menarche. When I asked her husband, Rastam (aged 54), he said to me laughing “what else could I do but to force her to have sex.” He was referring to his wife’s lack of experience of sex. Forced sex at first intercourse was also reported by Iswarini (2011) in other regions in West Java, a result of forced and underage marriage in the lower classes.

Women’s lack of information about sex and about how their bodies work prevented them from exploring their desire, let alone enjoying sexual initiation.
with their husband. Many women surrender to having sex as a part of their assumed role as a wife, which ascribes that sex in marriage is their duty. For example Lina (aged 37; aged 21 at first marriage) said that “on the first night I felt unsure and did not enjoy it because I had not accepted him wholeheartedly.” Siti (aged 40; aged 21 at first marriage) said: “I did not enjoy my first night because I did not know anything about sex, nor about my husband.” She described it as a “cold” (dingin-tingin saja) night and she considered both of them ignorant (bodoh) about sex. It should be noted that many husbands were also anxious about ‘first night’ sexual activity, which many of them were to experience for the first time. In Indonesian society, men are assumed and expected to have more knowledge of sex than women.

Rani (aged 43; aged 21 at first marriage) also said:

I did not have sex with my husband for a week after the wedding. Honestly, I still could not accept him as my husband. I even slept with my back against him and divided the bed with a pillow in-between us. A week later, I agreed to have sex, but only half-heartedly (setengah hati).

Rani told me that her sister noticed that she had not yet had sex with her husband because she had not washed her hair as a symbol of purification (mandi wajib),⁴⁴ which is required after intercourse in Islam. Ina (aged 33; aged 25 at first marriage) also said that: “I had not accepted my husband hundred percent and that affected my sexual relation with him.”

Several women also experienced unfamiliarity with cohabitation. Some women felt strange and surprised the next morning, realising that they had woken up with a man beside them. On the first night, Ijah (aged 33; aged 20 at first marriage) felt surprised that she had shared her bed and blanket with ‘someone else’. She had been used to sleeping on her own. She said that she needed a while

⁴⁴Obligatory bath (Arabic. ghusl) in Islam is a bath that is obligatory for a person whenever one is at certain conditions that obliged him/her to perform cleanliness (thahara) such as wet dream (male), menstruation (female), intercourse (male and female), bleeding after birth (female). Bathing symbolises cleanliness and readiness to perform religious rites like praying, fasting and reciting the Qur’an.
to become accustomed to this change. Mala (aged 40) also felt surprised when she found out that she shared her bed with ‘a stranger’ who happened to be her husband. This anxiety among women concerning a new husband can be understood as a function of the short courtship period and unfamiliarity with sharing living space with men. In Indonesia, the norm also regulates male-female interaction, limiting the open physical sharing of space between the sexes. Although in Indonesia strict segregation is not clearly defined, as in Middle Eastern countries, typically women and men are homosocial and self-segregate.

Delaying first sexual encounters for women on the wedding night is common for other reason such as tiredness and embarrassment, as there are still many relatives in the house. The lack of privacy is an issue for couples who live in a small house together with other family members. The couple’s bedroom, which is usually decorated and situated in the front of the house, sometimes with just a curtain separating bamboo or timber-walled rooms. Nisa (aged 37; aged 24 at first marriage) for example said “I felt shy on my first night. There were still many family members and relatives who spent the night at my home. Besides, I did not know anything about having sex.” By contrast, Nisa said that her husband seemed to know what to do that night. He prayed (shalat), a step to be fulfilled before intercourse, as indicated in Islamic guides. However, she did not have sex with her husband for about a week after the wedding due to her period\textsuperscript{45}. After she finished menstruating, her husband asked her to spend the night at his place, a few blocks away from her house, and have sex.

Edah (aged 43; aged 24 at first marriage) also said:

Although I read a sex manual, I still felt scared. We did not do anything that night. There were still many family members and relatives who slept just in front of my bedroom. I was shy that they would tease me in the morning. We were even very careful to move, to avoid any noise come from our bed. We tried to sleep quietly.

\textsuperscript{45}Having sex with menstruating woman is prohibited in Islam.
In Indonesian everyday life, males and females learn about shame (malu). Malu is associated with different categories, from exposure of the naked body, self-exposure to strangers to showing respect to the elderly and elites (Collins & Bahar, 2000). As explained by Collins and Fuller (2000), malu supports hierarchical relations and shapes gendered response. The meaning of malu also differs between boys and girls; as for girls it relate to femininity (Blackwood, 2010). Bennett (2005a, p. 25) further explains the term malu associated with female sexuality as:

[E]nduring notions of passive femininity… Shame is therefore understood as a necessary emotion that enables the self-regulation of female sexuality, yet is also threatening when derives from the public exposure of female sexual impropriety.

Malu was experienced by my participants in relation to exposing their naked body to their husbands, who in many cases were older than themselves and they were malu to show their interest in sex.

Many women mentioned that their sexual initiation on the first night happened naturally, including Rosa (aged 44; aged 20 at first marriage), Aas (aged 28; aged 21 at first marriage) and Tuti (aged 55; aged 19 at first marriage). They did not explain further whether this experience led to sexual enjoyment or whether they simply followed instructions from their husbands as most women did.

Apart from those experiences, many women interviewed also had a successful first night. “Successful” as explained by the women I interviewed, can mean mutual interest in sex, cooperation with the husband in having sex, enjoying intercourse and an experience that was not painful. The rumour of painful ‘first night’ arises partly because men tend to rush sex that night, especially when this is also their first sexual intercourse, or when forced penetration occurs without proper foreplay. Lack of foreplay could also inhibit woman’s sexual desire. Ikah (aged 30; aged 18 at first marriage) mentioned that “my friends told me that the first night would be painful and they said that if we refuse to have sex, our husbands will force us to do so. But, fortunately, I did not experience all those
things. I did not feel pain, nor was I forced.” Tia (aged 36; aged 22 at first marriage) said: “at first I felt shy, but I read in the classical Islamic book that I needed to respond and not just lie there passively. So, I responded to my husband’s sexual intention and enjoyed it.”

Ani (aged 45, 38 at first marriage) had a different story of her first night. It was not she who felt shy at malam pertama, but her husband. They had only met once and a week later decided to get married. On the wedding night, instead of sleeping in Ani’s bedroom, her husband slept on the sofa in the living room. Ani pulled him into their bedroom and told him that they were already married and it would be embarrassing for her if her family found out that he slept on the sofa instead of in their bedroom. Her husband told her that he was shy and would join her if she turned the light off. Ani agreed and they finally shared their bed.

Other women cooperated with their husband. While they still experienced a feeling of fear and shame, they enjoyed it and felt happy, as Tia and Wiwi noted above. Some husbands could tolerate their wives un-preparedness, but for a certain time only. Besides, the family member would notice and suggest consummation and women also already have the perception of this duty, so they felt obliged to fulfil it regardless of their (un)readiness.

Women’s lack of information and knowledge concerning sex and sexuality influences their first experience of having sex. They do not know what to do during sexual intercourse, and therefore cannot explore their desires and pursue pleasure and satisfaction. What they focus on is how to satisfy their husband’s sexual needs and desires. It seems from the women’s experiences outlined above, the first sexual experience for women is not geared towards the goal of seeking pleasure, although many were curious about that.

Marital Sex as Duty

Regardless of education and economic background, most of the women I interviewed stated that sex in marriage is their duty. Consequently, they try to
provide this service whenever their husbands express a need. Information concerning the notion that sex is the wife’s duty is acquired from various sources. Some said they learnt it from religious teachings that they read in certain kitab (Islamic classical texts) in pesantren (Islamic boarding school), or heard it from pengajian (religious gatherings); some said they acquired knowledge from reading sex manuals, while others said they knew it from friends and observed cultural behaviors around them.

Gender and sex role division between wife and husband in marriage, which is supported by the state and religious teaching, has given one gender power over the other. Assigned as head of the household, men feel in charge of their wives and the entire household. This also applies in terms of sexual relations where women are expected to be sexually passive and submissive to fulfil men’s sexual desires. Thus in sexual relations the husband believes he deserves to be sexually fulfilled because marriage is understood to provide full access to the wife’s body whenever it is desired. This idea gives men the power to decide when and how to have sex. Most of the time, marital sex is about satisfying husband’s sexual desire not the wife’s: he decides the time and the position and his wife has to be ready, whether she is willing or not. This can be seen from the wives’ expressions as follow:

Whenever my husband wants to have sex I have to do it regardless of my unwillingness to do so, because it is my duty; whether I enjoy it or not. (Rani, aged 43)

In my marriage, you know, my sexual satisfaction is unimportant. The most important thing is to make my husband satisfied [sexually]. Rarely have I experienced orgasm during my marital sexual relations. If it wasn’t my duty, I would be lazy (malas) about doing it. (Rosa, aged 44).

If my husband wants to have sex, he will do it right away, no matter how sleepy and unwillingly I am; he even slaps me on the face to make me wake up and fulfill his desire. (Ita, aged 56)
Some women’s reluctance to refuse their husband’s sexual demands is associated with cultural and religious proscriptions of pamali (taboo) and dosa (sin), or simply for fear of provoking the husband’s anger and infidelity.

Since I have been going to pengajian (religious gathering), I have heard the Islamic teaching that if the husband asks to have sex, you should do it even when you are doing the dishes; you should stop doing (what you are doing) it and fulfill your husband’s sexual desire. (Rani, aged 43)

I was told not to refuse my husband’s sexual need; it is pamali (taboo). (Eha, aged 29)

I feel disturbed by my husband’s sexual desires, as he always wants to have sex every day. I feel tired and unwell if we do it that often. But if I refuse him, I am afraid that he will betray me for another woman. (Iis, aged 40)

I always fulfill my husband’s request to have sex. I am afraid that he will get angry if I refuse him. (Edah, aged 43)

When women have a chance to refuse sex, they associate it with feelings of guilt.

When I am tired or sleepy I just ignore him, but often, I can’t get to sleep that night for fear of sin. I make sure that my husband is not angry and apologise to him in the morning. (Sinta, aged 39)

Failure to provide this service may jeopardise their marriage, if men seek sexual pleasure outside the marriage. Guilt often lingers in women’s minds, as a sense of responsibility for their husband’s infidelity or his finding another wife (Iis and Tia). Thus, wives are held responsible for their husbands’ sexual satisfaction and it is their fault if he has an affair.

On the other hand, a husband does not always comprehend his wife’s desire and she has less power than her husband to make the husband fulfil her desire. In fact, to express her desire, a woman has to gather all her courage; to put aside her shyness and reticence.

Rosa for example said:

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46 This teaching is very popular in Indonesia, with many versions. I will explain this teaching and other Islamic teachings related to sexuality in Islam in more detail in Chapter Nine.
My sexual desire increased significantly during the fourth month of my pregnancy. But, my husband worked in another city and when I wanted to have sex and called him to come home, he did not come. Maybe because it was not the weekend yet.

Leli also said:

Once I asked my husband to have sex, but he refused. Maybe it was because he was not in the mood. I was really disappointed and irritated. To ask for it, I had to gather all my courage and when he refused, not only was I embarrassed, but also frustrated (sakit hati).

Although in the end, Leli’s husband apologised to her for what had happened, Leli told herself that she would never initiate sex with her husband ever again. When the husband refused, a wife might also try to find rationality behind his refusal as indicated above. A woman has no language with which to speak out about her desire because she is trained to silence her desire. A woman is not supposed to initiate sex, because it is the man’s job to do so; a woman is only expected to respond. When a woman initiates sex, this could mean that she is taking control, which may damage her husband’s pride. One woman said “My husband believes that man is in charge of woman (referring to the Qur’anic verse (Q.S 4: 34 ‘arrijalu qawwamuna ala nisa’) and that includes sexual activity” (Sandra, aged 57). Research by Munir (2002) among Javanese women showed inequality in sexual relations was influenced not only by Javanese tradition but also Islamic precepts, including the verse cited above to claim male power over women.

Some women indicated that they initiate sex, but when they do the husband teases them about it, which makes them embarrassed. Consequently, many women say they tend not do so. Hera (aged 28) said: “As a woman I am shy to ask for sex, so I’d rather not.” Many women have never initiated sex (nor intend to), for fear of their husband’s (unpleasant) perception of them as sexually experienced. Research in another region in Indonesia also shows that married women are expected to be “neither seductive nor lustful” (Parker, 2001, p. 182).

Limited information also influences women’s expression of desire. The discussion of sexuality is absent from government textbooks concerning sexuality
for young adults (Utomo, 2003; Parker, 2008). In the Indonesian context, talking about sex and sexuality is still considered taboo and sensitive despite the display and accessibility of sex in this technological era. The discourse opposing sex education is morally justified on the grounds that it can encourage early sexual experimentation or permissive behaviour. This ignores the fact that sex education is important to give comprehensive knowledge about sexuality, which enables young people to better make decisions concerning their bodies and sexuality.

Consequently, many women know very little if anything about how their body works. Many only find out through experience, for example, at menarche and first intercourse on _malam pertama_. As a result, they never know what to do or what to expect; what bodily changes they might experience, the consequences of such, or how to take care of their body in relation to cleanliness. During FGD in my fieldwork, one woman told me that she was only informed by her mother that she would experience menstruation, without further explanation of what it was. She could only wonder about it until she experienced it herself (FGD I, 09/06/2012). A young man (during FGD) also said that: “We were told by our teacher that one sign of puberty is that we (as males) will experience wet dreams (_mimpi basah_), but we were never told what it means or what kind of dream that is” (FGD V, 20/07/2012).

However, based on my field research, the strength of the scripts does not mean that women do not want to experience pleasure in sex. Several of the women question and resist their unsatisfied sexual experience. Sandra (aged 57, aged 25 at first marriage), for example, in her first year of marriage, was a submissive wife who believed that sex in marriage was her duty. When she did not experience pleasure in sex with her husband she did not complain. However, she always thought about it and wondered why this sex was not enjoyable for her. Only later in her marriage did she have the courage to communicate this problem to her husband. Now they enjoy mutual satisfaction in sex. Eha (aged 29) also mentioned, “I felt disappointed if I could not reach orgasm. But what else could I do, I just accepted it.” She never told her husband about this feeling. Only a few
among my informants felt able to express their complaints, and most could not communicate their sexual preferences to their husbands. Many remained silent, accepting it as their duty. To raise these issues, they would worry about whether or not it was appropriate for them to question it, to express it and to demand something different. They doubted themselves. They were also concerned about their husbands’ judgment if they raised this issue. For example, Nisa (aged 37) said: “If I frequently ask him to have sex I am afraid that my husband will question why it is me who often asks for it.”

The above explanation shows that women’s perception and behaviour in their marital experiences are deeply influenced by ‘sexual scripts’, either cultural norms or religious prescriptions. Women try to fulfill the sexual behaviour prescribed by these scripts by being submissive and obedient, prioritising ‘duty’ and sacrificing their own desire. Within this parameter, the discussion of women’s pleasure and choice is absent from conversation.

**Silencing Women’s Desire**

The term ‘desire’ in this thesis refers to “the motivation to engage in sexual acts” (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998, p. 2). It is a broad term and is not limited only to sexual intercourse. It is still considered difficult, if not dangerous, in Indonesia to discuss desire, especially for women. In this thesis I argue that three associated principles have significant influence in preventing and controlling its discussion, namely: cultural norms, state regulations, and religious prescriptions. Sex in marriage for women is associated with serving and satisfying their husbands’ sexual desire. Thus, women’s own sexual desires and satisfaction are unimportant and ignored.

Research in another area in Indonesia suggests the same perceptions related to women’s desire. Jennaway (2003) explains that Balinese society does not accommodate female desire and when young women show their desire, they are associated with hysterical illness. Bennett (2005a) also reported that there is still little discussion about desire in the research on women’s sexuality in Indonesia.
The ideals of *malu* (shame) and *pasrah* (compliance) characterise appropriate women’s behaviour to maintain chastity and modesty (Blackwood, 2010; Bennett, 2005a). It is always said that women should maintain their desire in accordance with chastity and virginity, and with an eye to being a respectable and reputable future wife/mother (Bennett, 2005a). Women who transgress from this social script may be stigmatised or labelled as deviant. If women show their knowledge of sexual engagement and take control of it, it might threaten and challenge their appearance of modesty and could lead to a bad reputation. This script prevents women from exploring and expressing their own desire. Within these influential scripts, women develop their sexual selves as inferior/submissive sexual agents whose pleasure is unimportant compared to the service that they must provide for their husbands. In this context, male sexual pleasure is privileged. Women internalise these scripts which then become embodied in their relationships. These scripts pass on from one generation to another and become internalised in women’s minds, influencing their perceptions and guiding their behaviour in their sexual relations with their husbands. As women perceive that sex in marriage is their duty, they consider their sexual satisfaction in this relationship unimportant. Their main priority is how to make their husbands happy and satisfied. Many women I interviewed confirmed this prescription and act in accordance with these common beliefs.

This hesitation to discuss their sexual preferences with their husbands has made women lose interest in exploring their desires. Instead, they divert it to something (or someone) else like caring for the children or doing other activities. Research in another region in Indonesia suggests that compared to men, women are better able to control their desire (Brenner, 1998). Perhaps, women are presumed better able to control their desire because their desire is invisibilised. This condition is worsened by the typically hierarchical relationship between the spouses in terms of age, education and class gap, which negatively affects women in the negotiation process and expressing their desire. Lessening the
taboo associated with the discussion of sexuality and putting it under the topic of women’s reproductive rights could open up awareness to women’s desires. Furthermore, one might expect that the changing marriage patterns today, from parentally-arranged marriages to self arranged, romantic and peer marriages should lessen the hierarchical relationship between spouses.

The Etiquette of Intercourse in Islam

There are certain rules prescribed in Islamic discourse concerning sexual intercourse. The majority of women I interviewed are quite familiar with all these rules, while a few others are not. They mentioned various sources from where they obtained this information: classical kitab, marriage and sex Islamic manual books, kyai, and pengajian. Several steps that a couple needs to do before having sex are explained below.

These women mentioned randomly the steps they performed before engaging in intercourse. These steps are: ablutions (wudhu), praying (shalat), reciting certain verses in the Qur’an, mukaddimah (Arabic, lit. introduction; foreplay), reciting the prayer before penetration.

Most of the women who are familiar with these steps mentioned that in practice, they are unable do all these steps. Several women said: “(laughing) I has no time to do all those steps” (Hera, aged 28). However, they mentioned that if unable to do all the steps, at least reciting the prayer before penetration is a must. There is a special prayer assigned for intercourse, namely:

Allahumma jannibna syaithan wa jannibi syaithan ma razaqtana..., (O God, protect us from Satan and keep Satan away from the children You grant us).

By reciting this prayer the couples believed that they will not be disturbed by Satan who can lead them astray. Several other women declared that reciting the prayer before intercourse means that having sex is not just about lust (nafsu), but more importantly means that God will bless the union. (For more details about this discussion see the next section on sex as ibadah, part of worship).
Based on my interviews, it is evident that men and women have equal knowledge of the Islamic prescriptions concerning the etiquette of intercourse. Sometimes, within a couple, only the wife knew the rules and the exact prayer before intercourse and told the husband to comply. Similarly, in other couples it may be the husband who knows more about certain rules before intercourse. Mia (aged 25) for example said:

My husband did not know about the Islamic rules of intercourse and I told him about that. But my husband complained because there are too many steps and he couldn’t do all of them. I told him he should at least recite the prayer before penetrating me, and I taught him the exact words of the prayer.

Another woman, Mira (aged 50) said: “It is my husband who is concerned about Islamic rules of intercourse like reciting the prayer.” The common steps that many couples still take before intercourse are: ablutions, praying (shalat) and reciting the prayer of intercourse.

Another Islamic convention familiar among the female participants is the necessity to cover the naked body while having intercourse. It is suggested the bodies be covered while having sex with a blanket or other fabric (like a sarong). They were told that Satan and the angels are watching so it is appropriate to cover the body during intercourse. However, Maya (aged 41) said:

But I ignore this rule. I do not want to miss the aesthetic (estetika) of intercourse with my husband. I don’t mind being fully naked in front of my husband. Sometimes my husband wants to see me naked and I want to see him too. So we do it.

She further explained that she heard this rule from an ustaz (religious teacher) a long time ago, and according to her his thoughts might be out of date. Four other women also mentioned this etiquette of covering the bodies with a blanket while having sex.

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47 As explained in chapter four, this belief is referred to a hadith that is considered weak (dla’if). The reliable hadith (shahih) mentioned that it is ok for the couples to be naked and see each other private organ while intercourse.
Another form of pre-intercourse etiquette is *mukaddimah* (Arabic, literally, introduction) or *pemanasan* (stimulation). The word *mukaddimah* refers to the importance of foreplay before intercourse and it is taken from the Prophet’s report to his companion:

“One of you should not fulfill one’s (sexual) need from one’s wife like an animal, rather there should be a messenger between you. And what is that messenger? they asked, and he replied: “kisses and (sweet) words.” (Daylami, vol. 2, Hadith no. 55)"

Many women said that for women it is important that the husband stimulate them in order that they can enjoy sex without pain, with sufficient lubrication and so they could possibly reach orgasm. However, not many husbands would do foreplay before intercourse. Several women complained about the lack of foreplay by their husband and said that that could make intercourse painful. On the contrary, these women said that it was easy to arouse their husband and only by touching any part of his body they could stimulate him. Several women also said that if the husband does foreplay for too long it would make him ejaculate early.

Another aspect of etiquette that the women identified was not having sex while the woman is menstruating and not having anal sex. Both of these are forbidden in Islam (Q. 2: 222 – 223 and from Hadith). Bathing together is also suggested, following the practice of the Prophet Muhammad and his first wife (Khadijah). One woman, Halimah, said that she often bathes together with her husband as she learnt this from pengajian.

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*Q. 2: 222:* “They question thee (O Muhammad) concerning menstruation. Say: It is an illness, so let women alone at such times and go not unto them till they are cleansed. And when they are purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you.”

*Q. 2: 223:* “Your women are a tilth for you (to cultivate) so go to your tilth as ye will, and send (good deeds) before you for your souls, and fear Allah, and know that ye will (one day) meet Him.” This verse is usually interpreted as permission for a husband to approach his wife whenever and however he wants, except an anal sex. It is supported by a Hadith: “If he likes he may (have intercourse) being on the back or in front of her, but it should be through vagina.” (Muslim, Book 008, no. 3365)
Mutual orgasm between wife and husband is actually suggested in Islam. There is a Hadith suggesting that a husband should wait until his wife reaches orgasm.\textsuperscript{49} However, this Hadith is not popular and seems to be ignored.

The majority of the women were familiar with Islamic etiquettes of intercourse, some of them mentioning certain Islamic texts related to it. Apart from the text that positions women inferior to men in sexual relations, there are texts that support women’s exploration of their sexual satisfaction. However, only a few women knew these texts and they were not that familiar compared to those prescribing sex in marriage as a duty.

\textit{“More than just lust”: Sex as Ibadah}

In Islam, sexual activity within marriage is considered not only a biological act but also a blessing and a part of \textit{ibadah} (worship).

One report attributed to the Prophet said: “Even in your sexual organs there (can) be (reward for) charity.” (The companions) asked: “O Prophet, does a person who fulfills his sexual desires earn spiritual rewards?” The Prophet answered: “What if (meeting the need of) the sexual organs is done in a forbidden (\textit{haram}) way, does he not incur a sin?” “Yes,” they replied. “Likewise then, if (a person meets his sexual needs) in a lawful (\textit{halal}) way, he gains a blessing.” (Muslim, 1955, Vol. II, Hadith no. 1674, p. 329).

Several women I interviewed considered their sexual activity with their husband as \textit{ibadah} that has a spiritual meaning. From the interviews, I observed there are two types of situations where women categorised sexual activity as \textit{ibadah}. The first is related to the above mentioned Hadith: that lawful sexual activity will receive God’s blessing. For example, the women mentioned that if they recite a prayer before having sex, the act of sex was not merely the expression of lust between the spouses but also part of serving God. This is particularly the case when the sexual act aims at procreation: the couple hopes that the blessed act will

\textsuperscript{49} This Hadith was narrated by Annas bin malik, the Prophet said: “If any of you have sex with his wife let him be true to her. If he attains his pleasure before her then he shouldn’t hurry her away until she also attains her pleasure.” (Abi Ya’la, VII, p. 208-209)
produce children who will be good child/ren (anak shaleh/shalehah). Mira (aged 50) said:

> Having sex according to Islam is not merely about lust, but also about how to have good children (melahirkan anak-anak yang shaleh). And to do that, there are certain forms of etiquette in Islam that allow one to get a blessing from Allah.

Lina emphasised that “If I recite a prayer before intercourse there is more than just lust in our act: we will get a blessing from Allah; that is ibadah.”

The second category of ibadah in sexual activity is referred to as compensation, i.e. woman’s compensation for her dissatisfaction with her sexual experiences with her husband. For many women, sex is about fulfilling their husband’s sexual demands, and if they refuse, they are afraid of certain religious consequences. In reality, not every time the husband asks to have sex the wife also wants to have sex. In this situation, many women submitted to their husband’s desire for sex and believed they will be recompensed in the Hereafter. Hence, performing sex as a duty is part of worship (ibadah). One woman, Rani, told me that at present she never refuses to have sex with her husband even when she feels unwilling to do so. She said:

> Sometimes, I can’t be bothered to do it [intercourse], but, never mind, I just do it; it is my duty. Because by doing it I will get a reward from God. I consider it as my investment in the afterlife and to pay for my previous mistakes. Besides, afterwards, I feel I’ve made up for my mistakes (lunas).

Rani noted that in her early years of her marriage she often refused her husband’s requests to have sex. These days, since she has been actively involved in pengajian, where she has been taught that serving her husband sexually is her duty and to refuse him is a sin, she never refuses him.

Another interesting story came from Halimah, who said:

> Sometimes, I feel unwilling to have sex. Nevertheless, I always offer it to my husband. I heard from pengajian that if the wife initiates sex, she will get a reward (pahala) from Allah.
Maya added some points related to the discussion about sex as duty related to *ibadah*. She said:

Because there is *dalil* (proof of texts) related to wife’s duty to serve the husband sexually, we need to follow them. It implies that our entire act is not only for our earthly wellbeing (*kemaslahatan dunia*) but also for our heavenly welfare (*kemaslahatan akhirat*).

The respondents try to follow the rules prescribed in Islam concerning their sexual relationships with their husbands. Several women who knew the Islamic etiquette of intercourse would practice it, though not fully. However, reciting the prayer of intercourse was considered a necessity in order to get a blessing from God. Many women associate the act of sex not merely with lust but also as part of worship (*ibadah*): that if they perform their duty they will receive a blessing from God.

One dilemma among women related to serving their husbands sexually is that when they do not want to have sex, there is fear of religious consequences imposed for refusing. Sexual desire for these women is influenced by many factors, not only biological urge, and they were not willing to serve their husband sexually every time. Women usually associated their act of serving their husband as a sacrifice in this world, an investment that would be rewarded in the Hereafter.

In the analyses of Hoel and Shaikh (2013, p. 81) concerning sex as *ibadah* reside “coercive inner logic” that women should not refuse the act of *ibadah*. This logic is also used by men as justification for sexual coercion towards their wives.

**Domestic and Sexual Violence**

This section contains the stories of nine women who experienced abusive marital relationships; five will be presented in detail here. It was upsetting for these women to describe the violence they had experienced, as it revived their unpleasant memories. Most of the women cried while telling their stories and lamented their fate. They consider their life experiences as miserable. I referred
the women who experienced the most serious abuse to professional services for further assistance. Most of the women I interviewed said that they had never told anyone else about their marital life. After finishing their stories, these women mentioned that they felt free (plong) and released. They were thankful for having been able to relieve the heavy burden that they had kept for so long. They said they could not tell their story to friends or families because they were afraid that they would become the subject of gossip. But they felt safe talking to me because I assured them of anonymity and the confidentiality of their stories.

Four out of the nine women are divorced from their husbands, while the other five are still negotiating their husbands’ violent behaviour. The women in these stories experience various forms of violence from their husbands: verbal, physical, sexual, economical, and psychological violence. The definition of domestic violence presented here follows the recommendation of The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1994) which defines violence against women as any violence that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women. Indonesia adopted this definition and in 2004 showed serious attention to domestic violence by issuing Law No. 23/2004 on The Eradication of Domestic Violence / UU PKDRT No. 23/2004 (Undang-Undang Penghapusan Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga). In this Law, domestic violence includes any act that constitutes violence; it is not limited to physical violence and includes sexual and psychological violence and abandonment of the marital relationship—all of which have been experienced by the nine female participants introduced below. However, as will be seen in the discussion below, most women associated domestic violence as merely physical violence.

1. **Ita, 59, lecturer, Masters Degree**

Ita’s husband was one of her suitors. The reason that she finally chose him was because she needed someone to protect her and avoid fitnah (gossip associated with illicit intimacy), although she realised that he showed violent behaviour by forcing her to accept him.
Later in their marriage, Ita’s husband’s violent behaviour became obvious and excessive. He would get angry whenever he noticed the house was untidy or dirty. When he was angry, he often slapped Ita on her face or kicked her in the back.

Ita said:

I never stopped cleaning things around the house whenever my husband was at home and I would make sure that everything was clean and tidy.

However, her efforts did not prevent her husband from being violent to her. This happened for a long time, and caused physical and psychological pain. She often felt her body shaking unexpectedly for no reason; she was unable to move her fingers properly, her backbone hurt, and she had difficulty swallowing food. Her doctor even commented about her frequent visits related to her physical injuries.

Ita’s husband also often abused her sexually. According to Ita, he had a high sexual desire and often wanted to have sex at all hours of the day. Whenever he arrived home late at night from work or from visiting another city and Ita was asleep, her husband would wake her up to serve him sexually. He never considered that Ita might be still sleepy or unwilling to have sex; he would slap her face if necessary to make her fully awake and serve him. By the time she reached 50, Ita could not compete with her husband’s sexual demands any more. She often felt pain during intercourse because of the lack of vaginal lubrication and various other bodily pain, while her husband still wanted to have sex twice a night. Sometimes Ita felt stiff and numb and could not even move, yet had to do a second round. Ita did not enjoy having sex with her husband because he never considered how she felt. He was only concerned about his own satisfaction. Her husband even complained about Ita’s physical condition saying that it decreased his pleasure in having sex.
2. Acih, 49, Petty Trader, Never finished school (year 2 Elementary School)

Acih got married to her husband when she was 13. Her husband was 20 at that time. When Acih spoke about her husband’s violent behaviour, she said:

He would yell and scream at me when he was angry; he hit me on my face or my body. One day, he ran after me with a knife in his hand.

Acih’s husband also forced Acih to have sex whenever he needed it; for instance, on their first night (malam pertama) on their wedding night. At that time Acih did not know anything about sex and was frightened. Her husband forced her to have sex with him. I had an opportunity to ask Acih’s husband, who was also present while we were doing the interview, about his violent behaviour.

He said:

At that time, I was still young and if I had a problem with a friend or experienced disappointment I would vent my frustration and anger at home. And my wife was the target – who else? because she was the one at home. And about our first night (malam pertama), she didn’t know how to do it [intercourse], so what else could I do except force her to have sex [laughing].

Acih also suffers from economic violence. Her husband never provides financial support for her and the children. They have 12 children from the marriage. Acih must always think hard about how to feed her children, while her husband never contributes money to the household. While he was away and did not support her, Acih worked hard to provide a daily income.

Acih said:

I often worked (weeding or collecting wood) with my baby on my back even while I was heavily pregnant. I usually work when I am ill too. I have to because my husband never brings home money.

Acih’s husband has been unemployed for several years. Research by Idrus (2001) in Sulawesi reported that violence from unemployed husbands are a way for them to show their power within marriage. According to Acih, since her fifth child, Acih’s husband’s violent behaviour has been decreasing, especially now in his older age. Acih’s husband confirmed that nowadays, in their older age, he has
become more aware of Acih’s efforts in taking care of the children and her financial contribution to the household.

3. **Iis, 40, Teacher at Elementary School, High School**

When her husband proposed to her, Iis was unsure about her feelings for him. She did not know him well. However, she finally accepted him because she felt indebted (*berhutang budi*) to him for his kindness. It was only later in their marriage that Iis realised he could be violent. Her husband would get angry whenever he had a problem outside the house with his friends or at his work and he would release his anger on her. Whenever he got angry, he said rude things to her, insulted her and hit her. He also smashed everything in the house. What makes Iis confused is that whenever he has finished banging or smashing things in the house, he just says: “OK, I am finished now. Let’s tidy up the mess,” as if nothing had happened. In addition, when he meets the neighbours, he seems so kind and friendly that people cannot imagine his violent behaviour at home.

The worst abuse Iis has experienced was when her husband hit her with a thick wooden sandal on her head until she bled and had to go to the hospital. Her husband also once cut her hair when he was angry. Iis told her parents about her husband’s violent behaviour and wanted to ask for a divorce. Iis’ parents then warned the husband that if he continued being violent it would be better for him to divorce Iis. However, while Iis’ husband refused to divorce her, his violent behaviour did not change. Instead, he prevented Iis from visiting her parents.

The latest abuse happened one week before our interview, when her husband insulted her by saying “You’re stupid!” Iis could not accept his humiliating remarks any longer. She got angry and hit him. They quarrelled and brawled. But she could not compete with her husband’s strength and she was beaten by her husband.

Iis husband also has high sexual desire, and often wants to have sex every day. Iis feels disturbed by her husband’s sexual demands, but fears that refusing him
will lead him to look for sex outside. Iis confused (serba salah) about what to do about her husband’s violent behaviour. There is a tendency towards decreasing violence but it is still happening regularly in lis’ marriage.

4. **Sofi, 39, Kindergarten Teacher, High School**

Sofi was 37 when she first married; it was an arranged marriage. The abuse began at their first intercourse. Her husband seemed to have a low interest in sex, but when they did have sex it was a nightmare for her.

Sofi said:

> Whenever he wanted to have sex, he needed to watch a porn movie first. After that he would directly approach me and then put his fingers into my vagina forcefully. It really hurt. I don’t know why he did that. And then he penetrated me.

Sofi described it in tears, such that I needed to stop the interview for a while until she was ready to talk again. There was a deep sadness in her eyes and she told me that when that happened it was very painful for her. She further said that her husband never did foreplay to stimulate her desire but wanted to have sex directly and forcefully.

She said:

> I never enjoyed having sex with my husband. I never experienced pleasurable sex (surga dunia) with my husband. On the contrary, I was terrified of it. Though actually, we rarely had sex during our short period of marriage.

Sofi’s marriage only lasted for three months and she said they only had sex three or four times. Her husband divorced her for no valid reason and that made her shocked and stressed. She experienced a miscarriage during the divorce process.

5. **Uum, 35, Kindergarten Teacher, High School**

Uum secretly married (nikah siri), a more senior student at college because her older sister did not agree to her marriage. During her marriage, Uum’s husband often abandoned her and her daughter for long periods. While he was away, he
never gave her financial support. Uum has had to support herself and her daughter, doing whatever work was available. When Uum’s husband returned home, he would limit Uum’s movements outside the house and did not permit Uum to work. He often got angry for no valid reason. When he got angry, he would hit Uum across her face or kick her back. Uum also experienced being whipped with a broom (sapu lidi) by her husband. This violence has left some marks on Uum’s face, hands and feet. She said:

Luckily, I wear the head scarf so I can hide the scars and no one can see it. In fact, nobody knows, including my family, that my husband often abandons me and abuses me at home. I keep it to myself. I always lie to my family about his absence when I visit them.

Her husband was also sexually violent towards Uum. He forced her to have sex whenever he demanded. He never considered Uum’s feelings or health, whether she was tired or ill. If Uum showed reluctance, he would be irritated. For example, if Uum did not respond to him while having sex, he would get angry because it influenced his pleasure. If she refused to have sex, he would hit her, sometimes whip her, and he even toss burning cigarettes (disundut rokok) onto her lap. Her husband claimed that he has control in the marriage and that she should comply with his sexual demands. He even cited a Hadith text to justify his violence saying that:

The abuse that I did was nothing compared to what you will get later in the Hereafter if you refuse to have sex with me. The Hadith said that if you refuse me, the angels will curse you.

However, Uum argued that according to her, power in marriage has limits, including in matters of sex. Her husband cannot use it arbitrarily, especially after his desertion of her; he cannot claim his power. She said: “I never enjoyed being with my husband sexually, especially when I think about his bad temper and abandonment of me.”

Later on, Uum’s mother noticed that Uum had been deserted by her husband and she ordered Uum to return to her mother’s house. In 2009, Uum could not tolerate her husband’s behaviour any longer and she got a divorce. She is now
trying to manage her new life with her daughters and without her husband. She is actively involved in teaching and continues her study at university. She said:

I am studying hard to achieve what I missed out on. My friends have all already got their degrees. I want to have a better future. My past has been miserable; now I’m trying to get my life back. I know it won’t be easy but I am determined to do it. My life is like a broken glass; it is hard to put back together again, but that does not mean it’s impossible.

Discussion

Several of the women presented above experienced multiple forms of violence from their husbands. Some of them experienced physical and sexual abuse, or physical, sexual and economic abuse at the same time. Different types of physical attacks included being slapped, hit, kicked, dragged, having hard objects thrown at them, being whipped, and poked with live cigarettes; psychological abuse such as rude words, insults, yelling, and making threats; economic abuse and abandonment such as being financially unsupported for long periods, and being prevented from engaging in paid work; and sexual violence such as forced sex, vaginal injury, and fear of STIs.

A recent report from Komnas Perempuan (National Commission on Violence against Women) shows that the number of cases of violence against women reported to the Court has increased significantly from 93,133 cases in 2010 to 263,285 cases in 2013 (Komnas Perempuan, 2014, p. 20). The most common violence occurs in domestic life (71 percent) in the form of psychological abuse (50 percent), economic abuse (40 percent) and physical abuse (2 percent) and 8 percent is other unspecified abuse (Komnas Perempuan, 2014, p. 23 – 24).

Ironically, almost all of my participants who experienced domestic violence (with two exception), preferred to stay in their abusive marriages rather than getting a divorce. Although four of them were divorced, the applicant for divorce in each of these cases was the husband. The reasons the women stayed in their marriages were mostly related to their children’s wellbeing, keeping the marital property
and avoiding the label of ‘janda’ (widow or divorcée) which is stigmatised in Indonesia.

Women who experience an abusive marriage suffer from mental and physical harm perpetrated by their husbands. Psychologically, they feel nervous whenever their husbands are around, as they try not to make them angry because that can lead to physical abuse. The women feel fear because they are subject to a range of threats, from the threat of physical violence to that of taking another wife. Physically, the women suffer from injuries that range from bruises and scars on their bodies to bleeding. These women try to hide all their injuries from public eyes. None of the women had reported their husband’s violence to the authorities, even at the local level or to the police. These women are not aware of the law on domestic violence. This silence is related to internalised gender norms where women are advised, usually by their mothers, not to tell anyone else about marital problems or conflict within the marriage. It is considered an embarrassment to the whole family. The women are told they should keep it to themselves and if possible find a solution within the bounds of the marriage. My findings are in line with research conducted by Binahayati (2011) in West Java concerning perceptions and attitudes in relation to violence against wives. According to her research, women who experienced an abusive marriage refused to report this violence to the police and showed strong opposition to their husbands being punished or jailed (Binahayati, 2011, p. 118).

In Indonesia, marital problems and marital violence are considered private matters. Outsiders or third parties are advised not to interfere. This perception makes it difficult to implement the Law on the Abolition of Domestic Violence (UU KDRT). Until recently, reporting on domestic violence has been irregular, even after the establishment of UU KDRT. Many people still do not want to report it and do not even know about this law (Hayati, Hakimi, Hogberg, & Emmelin, 2013).
This research shows that domestic violence occurs across the social classes and among people of all educational backgrounds. It shows that abusive behaviour is not confined to poor and lower class marriages. Abuse occurred in marriages with higher educational and economic levels (e.g. Ita’s story) as well as in marriages of poor people with lower educational backgrounds (e.g. Acih’s story). Based on the research by Komnas Perempuan (2002), these abusive marriages happen as a result of the strong patriarchal system in Indonesia which positions women as inferior in the family and society (Komnas Perempuan, 2002, p. 69). Religious belief also seems to strengthen this system and many men find justification for their violence in religious texts (e.g. Uum’s case). The majority of violence in the home, therefore, is related to the husband’s power over the wife. Challenging a husband’s authority within the marriage can trigger further violence by the husband as reported by Aisyah & Parker (2012) on domestic violence in Sulawesi.

From my interviews, many women associate violence only with physical abuse. Other forms of aggression such as verbal insults, forced sex or economic abandonment are not considered violence. In fact, many women I interviewed, beyond the nine participants cited above, reported that their husbands sometimes ask them to have sex when they are unwilling to do so or without their full consent, and that can be categorised as marital rape. In many cases, these women do so for fear of the husband’s anger or infidelity, and do not consider it as violence. It seems that reporting sexual abuse in marriage is a sensitive issue (Bennett et al., 2011). Similarly, in Komnas Perempuan’s 2014 report sexual violence was not stated in many cases of domestic violence. However, Komnas Perempuan suggested that sexual violence may be categorised under psychological abuse, such as polygyny, forced and underage marriage and lack of harmony within the marriage (Komnas Perempuan, 2014). Besides, the Law on the Abolition of Domestic Violence (UU KDRT no. 23/2004) does not specifically discuss marital rape. This chapter also showed that the majority of the women interviewed consider sex in marriage as their duty, i.e.
that they should comply whenever the husband demands it. The women did not categorise unwanted sexual activity as sexual violence. Many women fear cultural and religious consequences, such as being cursed by angels, or that they will have committed a sin (dosa) or broken a cultural taboo (pamali) if they refuse to have sex.
Chapter Eight
Women’s Experiences of Marital Sexual Relationships: Sex as Right

I am a normal human being and I also want to experience orgasm. (Halimah, aged 31)

This chapter explores women’s experiences of marital sexual relationships with their husbands. Unlike the previous chapter which considers sex in marriage as a duty, several women claim that sex in marriage is also their right. With respect to women’s diverse experiences, this chapter explores women’s desires and negotiation of pleasure to find the possible sexual agency within their marital sexual relationships. This chapter also discusses women’s sexual experiences associated with reproduction: menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, infertility and menopause.

This study suggests that socio-cultural, religious and political influences shape the production and nature of desire. Social, cultural, religious and political forces regulate the structure of desires and the context in which desires should and should not emerge; they define ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, appropriate and inappropriate (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998). Within this context, women adopt strategies to negotiate their sexual preference in their marital sexual relationships.

Negotiating Desire; Exploring Pleasure

The most important element in negotiating women’s sexual desire, pleasure and enjoyment is communication. Building good communication with the spouse is important in knowing and understanding the preferences of each party when they engage in sex and what makes each of them feel comfortable during sex.

In practice, it is not that easy for the women I interviewed to discuss what they want or what they do not want with their husbands in relation to sexual preferences. As I mentioned earlier, the discussion of sex and sexuality is still
considered taboo; women are wrapped up by their feelings of shyness and modesty; and their subordinate position in the asymmetrical marital relationship prevents them from doing so. Fear (takut), restraint (segan) and shame (malu) are feelings that prevent women from talking about sexual matters, even with their husbands.

However, several women in my study reported that they managed to discuss sex with their husbands such as sex position and schedule. Fifteen out of 40 women I interviewed mentioned that in most cases they communicated with their husbands about sex, although not in detail, six women stated that only sometimes or rarely did they communicate about sex, while the other 19 women never discussed sex with their husbands.

**Sexual Position**

For many women I interviewed, the so-called missionary position with the man on top is the most popular and preferable position for intercourse. Their consideration is based on comfort. They called this position ordinary (biasa), simple (sederhana), normal or uncomplicated (tidak neko-neko).

Siti (aged 40) for example said:

> I told my husband to let us just do the ordinary position [missionary position] (posisi biasa) because we are respectable people and do not do weird positions like animals [referring to doggy style].

Other women were willing to try different positions as asked by their husbands. Some of them felt surprised to know there were lots of different positions they had not known before, but they would comply with their husbands’ instruction as long as it was not what they considered out of bounds (melampaui batas). One woman, Mia (aged 25), told me what she considered beyond the limit of acceptable sex, i.e. what she thought was forbidden in Islam:

> I do not mind doing different positions as asked by my husband as long as it’s not anal sex or sex while I have my period because these are forbidden in Islam. I also do not want to do it with the woman on top or in a sitting
position because I heard that it would damage both spouses’ renal systems.

Several other women confirmed that they would comply with different positions during intercourse except anal sex. Most women knew that anal sex is forbidden in Islam. However, when they felt uncomfortable having sex in unusual positions they would only tell the husband afterward, not while they were doing it. One woman, Edah (aged 43), told me that, “If I feel uncomfortable when in such positions, I tell my husband afterwards, not while we are doing it, because it usually ruins his desire.” Another woman, Aas (aged 28), also said that she usually discussed sex positions with her husband and if she felt uncomfortable having sex in some position, she would say to her husband, “The position that we just did was not that enjoyable for me.” According to some women, trying different positions for sex is necessary, and is related to the duration of intercourse, and they communicate to their husband the position that would make sex take longer and be more comfortable.

**Sexual Signs and Schedules**

The frequency of sex reported by the women ranged from every day to once a month. Couples where the husband has high sexual desire mentioned that they have intercourse almost every day. For older couples the frequency drops significantly for various reasons.

Iis (aged 40) stated that:

> I am disturbed by my husband’s sexual desire: he wants to have sex every day. I feel too tired and unwell to do it that often. I complain to him that he needs to control his desire and make a schedule for having sex. But he gets angry and accuses me of having an affair with another man instead. My husband states that if he misses having sex one day his body feels stiff and fatigued.

Iis said that having sex every day detracts from her worship time. Her husband tried fasting as it is believed to decrease sexual desire, but it did not work.
The couples also use various ways to communicate about sex. Some would easily talk to each other before or after having sex; some would talk about it in a humorous way to avoid embarrassment; some would write it down, while others use body language. Each couple has their own terms for intercourse. There are many terms in Indonesian to refer to intercourse. Some words that the women I interviewed used are: hubungan seks (sexual relationship), hubungan; berhubungan (to have a relationship; bond), berhubungan badan (to have a body relationship), bersetubuh (to become one body). Several women do not explicitly say the word but use euphemistic terms like: to do ‘that’ (Ind. Itu; Sundanese ‘eta’), or to do ‘that thing’; ‘something like that’ (melakukan hal itu; hal seperti itu). One example is Sinta (aged 40) and her husband, who have their own term for intercourse that is ‘nyunah’, and they usually have sex on Thursday nights (malam Jum’at).  

Ani (aged 45) has a different story: she and her husband never have sex at night, when most couples do. In fact, Ani really wants to experience it at night. Nevertheless, she said that her husband forbade it because it might disturb his worship time (night prayer). Thus, usually Ani takes a day off work on Fridays so she can stay at home with her husband.

Rani (aged 43) said:

Nowadays, I have sex with my husband once a week; previously we did it about twice a week. My husband never speaks if he wants to have sex but I know when he wants it. Sometimes he looks intently at me from morning on, and he will buy my favourite food. And then, at night he waits until I have finished putting the kids to bed. Then he makes some noise to signal that he is waiting for me to have sex. When that happens, I say, ‘So you want it?’ And he nods, and then we have sex.

The above mentioned experiences are only a small sample from the interviews in which women note that their husbands do not directly or verbally ask to have sex but give signals. In most cases, women have to comply whenever the husbands

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50The word nyunah is taken from sunnah, and is a way of referring to the practice of the Prophet. Muslims believe that Thursday night (malam Jum’at) is the most blessed night to have sex following the practice of the Prophet.
ask to have intercourse. Several women, however, find various strategies to excuse themselves from having sex with their husbands whenever they feel unwilling. Some of them pretend to fall asleep or go to bed earlier, sleep in their children’s bed or wrap themselves tightly around the bottom to prevent their husband from being able to access their lower half. Some reasons they gave for being unwilling to have sex were fatigue, being unwell, pregnancy, having recently given birth, conflict, economic difficulty, husband’s infidelity and abusive behaviour. These factors influence women’s desire.

Many women said that when they were tired after working all day they would just go to bed early or sleep in the children’s bedroom so that their husbands would not disturb them. Some of the husbands would notice and understand, while others would not. Those who noticed how their wife was feeling would restrain themselves from having sex that night but some would be disappointed or complain; those who did not might get angry and some would forcibly have sex even while the wife was sleeping, without her consent.

One woman, Tia (aged 36) said: “If I am tired, I fall asleep straight away, because I do not want to have sex.” Aas (aged 28) added that, “If I do not want to have sex, my husband also does not want to do it because it will not be enjoyable for him if I do not respond.”

Rani (aged 43) said:

When I am tired I just go to bed early, but sometimes, in the middle of my sleeping, I feel warm in my vagina. I just realise that my husband has already penetrated me while I am sleeping. I am just too sleepy to respond so I just continue my sleeping and ignore what is happening.

Another woman, Ijah (age 59), said: “When my husband wants to have sex but I don’t, I never respond to him. When he penetrates me, my body is stiff like a dead banana trunk (gedebog cau).”

Consent for sex is quite an issue among Indonesian Muslim women, who are expected not to refuse their husband’s intention to have sex regardless of their own desires. Those women who refuse their husband risk transgressing both a
cultural taboo and a religious sanction. Several husbands claimed that they have the right to access their wives’ bodies even without their consent.

Another factor that influenced women’s sexual desire was economic difficulties. Rani said: “My sexual desire decreases whenever I am having economical difficulties. I do not think about sex.” Once she refused her husband who returned from looking for a job in the city empty-handed. She said to him, “No, no, go away. You’d better look for a job and bring me money instead.” She further said that when there is no income she becomes worried and dislikes her husband for not trying hard enough to find a job. But that night she saw her husband masturbating and questioned him. Her husband argued that because she did not want to have sex with him, he masturbated.

Abusive behaviour also affects women’s interest in sex with the husband. Several women whose husbands have a bad temper not only feel fear but also suffer from violence.

Sofi (aged 39) said: “Every time I have sex with my husband, it really hurts and I never enjoy it.” Uum (aged 35) also said:

My husband often forced me and was violent whenever we had sex. It affected me and I often lost my desire. But if I was unwilling to do it he would notice and get angry, then hit me. I never enjoyed being with my husband sexually.

A husband’s infidelity also disturbs women’s desire, especially when the wife notices that the affair involves sex. This was experienced by Nanda (aged 36) whose husband has had an affair with another woman. She knew her husband had had sex with another woman because she could feel that her husband was no longer interested in having sex with her when he came home. “When I found out that my husband had an affair and had had sex with her, I did not want to have sex with him, I felt disgust.” Nanda often thinks when she is having intercourse with her husband that he may be infected with sexual diseases and might transmit a disease to her. She had already asked her husband to have himself
checked, but he refused. Nanda asked for a divorce from her husband when she found out that his sexual partner fell pregnant. She let her husband marry the woman with whom he was having an affair with but the marriage did not last for long and ended in divorce. Her husband then asked Nanda to remarry and she agreed. Nowadays, since they have become a couple again, Nanda still remembers his infidelity and this affects her whenever she has intercourse with him. She cannot bear to imagine her husband ever doing it (having sex) with another woman. Sometimes her husband gets angry if he notices that Nanda is still thinking about his previous affair. Nanda has said to him, “You might be forgiven but I’ve not forgotten what you’ve done to me.”

A different story is given by Nisa (aged 37), who experienced a threat of future polygyny from her husband. When she discovered that her husband wanted to practice polygyny and told her that he might have an eligible candidate, Nisa became more possessive of her husband. She felt that it was she who asked for sex more than her husband. Sexual jealousy is reported as the main concern in polygynous marriage (Nurmila, 2009; Nurmila & Bennett, 2015).

Another factor that influences women’s desire is when the woman cannot love her husband. Sex for these women is not only about a physical union but also involves romantic feelings and intimacy. Ina (aged 33) said that, “Once I refused my husband when we were about to have intercourse because I suddenly didn’t feel like it. I still could not love my husband and it affects me sexually.”

Lina (aged 37) also mentioned that, “In my first years of marriage I did not love my husband and it affected me when we had intercourse, I didn’t fully desire to have sex with him.” Over time she has grown to accept her husband and gradually to love him. Nowadays, according to her, their love is getting stronger. She now loves him wholeheartedly. She calls it love for the second time; a second puberty (puber ke dua) with her husband.

The two cases of Ina and Lina above demonstrate that a sexual relationship for these women is not just a physical union but also a romantic love relationship.
Some other women associate desire with emotional intimacy and a close relationship with the partner; it does not necessarily end with sexual intercourse. Nida (aged 25) stated: “Sometimes I only want to have a hug while watching TV with my husband or indulge myself in his arms, but he thinks that I want to have sex.”

Sexual activity for many women I interviewed means intercourse. For many, sexual intercourse is not only regarded as a biological urge, like the husbands suggest, but is associated with many factors as stated above that affect their desires.

**Exploring Desire**

While many women might experience discomfort in sexual relations with their husbands, other women can negotiate with their husbands on how to experience pleasure. One woman argues: “I am a normal human being and I also want to experience orgasm.” (Halimah, aged 31)

To build a good understanding concerning their spouse's sexual preferences, good communication is needed. Some couples are quite open in discussing sexual matters, but others are still hesitant. Leli (aged 29) would write down what she wants from her husband concerning sex in their special communication book. For example, once she noticed that her husband seldom asked her to have sex. She shared it with him, writing what she learnt from *pengajian* (religious gathering) about a verse in the Qur’an which states “nisaukum hartsun lakum”\(^5\). After reading these notes her husband confirmed that it did not mean that he was not interested in sex but that he was concerned about Leli, that she might be tired or unwilling. She further says: “My husband is a very understanding person. In terms of sex he does not want to have pleasure before I experience it. So, timing is very important for us, we never do it when one of us is tired.” Using a communication book is an effective way for them to communicate what they

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\(^5\)Q. 2: 223 “your wives are as a tilth unto you (to cultivate); so approach your tilth when or how ye will. But do some good act for your souls beforehand; and fear Allah.”
want and what they do not want, and can prevent misunderstandings between them. They can read each other’s messages and then discuss.

Tia (aged 36) also said:

I told my husband that in sexual relations he should not think only about his sexual satisfaction but that he should hold it until I also reach a climax. That was a Hadith I read that Hadith\textsuperscript{52} in pesantren.

Tia’s husband agreed and they even asked each other whether they felt satisfied that night. While Maya (aged 41) said, “We discuss what I want and what he wants [sexually]: there is time to give and to get.”

Orgasm does not happen every time. Several women mentioned that they sometimes reach orgasm while others said they rarely or never experience it. Several women indicated that to reach orgasm they need their husband to do foreplay. It depends on the husband’s skill in stimulating their wives in the beginning as to whether they can have mutual pleasure. Some couples watch BF (‘Blue Films’) – movies that contain many sex scenes – before intercourse. Women who rarely experience orgasm or pleasure mentioned that if they did not feel like having sex this would prevent vaginal lubrication and make intercourse painful. Some wives noted that if they asked their husbands to do foreplay, the husbands could not hold any longer and would ejaculate sooner. Other women have their own strategies when their husbands cannot hold their desire any longer. Aas (aged 28) would give her husband quick sex. She said to me during the interview that “just to let it go” (yang penting bucat). Several other women suggested that another factor preventing them from reaching orgasm is that their husbands have certain diseases that affect their stamina. Diabetes is the most frequently noted medical cause of husbands’ premature ejaculation.

There are times when wives also desire to have sex. Initiating sex verbally is still considered taboo for women. Most feel embarrassed (malu) if they initiate

\textsuperscript{52}See footnote no. 47.
because the gender perception in Indonesia suggests that woman should not show openly her interest in sex, otherwise she is negatively labeled. In Indonesia, *malu* associated with female sexuality refers to the femininity of passivity and submission (Bennett, 2005; Blackwood, 2010). However, many women found strategies to make the husband comprehend their desire without saying it. Most of the women said that in practice it is easy to attract their husband to have sex. Sandra (aged 57), for example, said, “Whenever I want to do it [intercourse], I dress up nicely, put on my make-up and perfume to attract him.” Other woman, Eha (aged 29), said: “Whenever I want to have sex (*berhubungan*) I touch my husband’s private parts and he understands.” Nisa (aged 37) said, “If I want it, I give him a massage so that he understands what I want”.

An interesting story is told by Halimah (aged 31), who without hesitation would ask her husband to have sex. She would offer it to her husband: “Do you want it (*hoyong teu*)?” Her husband would answer, “Yes I do, but I am tired right now.” Then, Halimah would reply: “Just relax, you do not have to do anything, let me handle that (*biar mamah nu ngageol*).” Her husband would agree. Halimah said, “I heard from *pengajian* that if the wife asks the husband to have sex, she will get *pahala* (reward) from Allah.” Further, she said that sex in married life is very important for her. She wants to make the sex in her marriage special so that her husband will always long for it. Based on her experience, this works really well for her marriage. Her husband is affectionate to her and spoils her with gifts.

Halimah’s story is unique compared to other women’s stories. Other women consider sex in marriage relatively unimportant. Rosa (aged 44) said that sex in marriage is not that important for her. Another woman, Edah (aged 43) gave a metaphor about sex in her marriage:

> Sex in marriage is like a dessert, not a main course. Unlike a main course, which you need to have every day, with dessert, sometimes you have it and sometimes you don’t.

Women express that sex in marriage is also their right. Sex is part of the married life that both spouses should enjoy mutually. Although there are several texts in
Islam that encourage the couple to experience a pleasurable and mutual sexual relationship, rarely did the women refer to these texts. Only one woman (Tia) claimed that there are also Islamic texts that speak of women’s rights to experience pleasurable sex. This suggested that the notion of sex as a mutual right in Islam is not that popular compared to the idea that sex in marriage is a wife’s duty.

**Sex and Reproduction**

In this section I discuss women’s sexual desire related to reproduction, which is an integral part of discussing women’s sexuality. Here, reproduction encompasses menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, infertility and menopause, which undoubtedly produce different states of desire for women.

**Pregnancy, Childbirth and Infertility**

In Indonesia, procreation is still the primary aim of marriage. A successful marriage is when the bride falls pregnant soon after the wedding. Therefore, many couples do not prevent pregnancy in the first year of marriage. In addition, the older generation often imposes the belief that if the couple tries to prevent pregnancy in the first year of marriage by practising contraception, it could make the woman’s womb dry, making it difficult later on to conceive. This was experienced by several women like Ikah (aged 30) and Aas (aged 28).

The majority of women I interviewed fell pregnant soon after their wedding. The interval between the wedding and the pregnancy ranged from weeks to a couple of months. The pressure to get pregnant quickly can cause social and psychological distress for a woman, because pregnancy confirms her existence within the extended family and the community where she belongs. Through marriage and having children, a woman will be considered an adult with an appropriate social status and the ability to participate in community activities (Grijns, 1987).
Participants had at least two to six children, with most having two to four. Two of the women have 12 children. Before the implementation of the family planning program in Indonesia, which began in the 1970s, there was a tendency towards a flexible number of children in West Java (Darroch, Meyer & Singarimbun, 1981). Darroch et al. (1981) reported that the desired number of children among the Sundanese was four to five. Poorer families tended to have more children (Van Bruinessen, 1988) because of the economic contribution they could make to the family (Darroch et al., 1981; Van Bruinessen, 1988). During the New Order (1966-98), the ideal was “two was enough” and this policy was quite firmly implemented (Niehof & Lubis, 2003). In the Reform era, after 1998, the ‘two-child’ policy stopped being a strict regulation for Indonesian families. Among my participants, there was a tendency toward more highly controlled fertility in the hope of better quality health and education for the children and to enjoy their old age. Maya (aged 41) stated:

I discuss everything with my husband, including how many children we want to have. At first we decided to only have two children but the third child arrived unexpectedly. We would like to prepare for their future: education and health with our limited funds. Besides, we also would like to enjoy our older age.

The idea of having a small family is no longer related to government pressure to control population, but rather reflects self reliance and an aspiration for “quality” rather than size in family life.

Several of the women I interviewed also experienced infant mortality. Six out of 40 of my female participants had experienced a miscarriage and five others experienced having lost child/children at birth, or a few weeks, months or years after childbirth. The reasons for miscarriage given are varied. Two of the women experienced stress because of their husband’s infidelity and the divorce process while carrying the baby (Ilah and Sofi). The others experienced bleeding after consuming a high dose of non-prescription medicine for headache (Rani), were exhausted (Edah), experienced a blighted ovum (Mala), an incompetent cervix (Ida), and ectopic pregnancy (Sandra).
Procreation is almost always the main aim of marriage; accordingly, a childless marriage is pitied and can lead to divorce (McDonald & Abdurrahman, 1974) or be a reason for polygyny (Indonesian Marriage Law: article. 4, point. 2c). Women are usually directly blamed for childlessness in marriage, regardless of which of the spouses has fertility problems. Research conducted by Bennett, Wiweko, Hinting, Adnyana, & Pangestu (2012) reports that a conservative estimate for infertility among those of reproductive age in Indonesia is between 10 and 15 percent, with men and women equal in incidence (Bennett et al, 2012). However, the impact of infertility is greater for women than for men because of the stigma of infertility, identity as ibu (mother), and recognition of social adulthood. Two of my participants shared their experience of infertility. Tia (aged 36) said:

It’s been twelve years since we got married. But I haven’t fallen pregnant yet. Conflict in my marriage between me and my husband is always about the absence of a child. So, I challenged my husband to visit the doctor to find out what has gone wrong. The result is that I was diagnosed as having a cyst in my womb, but there’s still a chance I can have a baby. In the meantime, my husband was identified as lacking quality semen. Having this consultation, I feel satisfied that my husband could not blame me any more for not having a baby, because I am not the only one who has fertility trouble. Then, we redefined the meaning of our marriage so having a child is not the only aim of our marriage.

Ina (aged 33) has a different story:

By our ninth wedding anniversary, a baby had still not arrived. Sometimes I questioned myself as to why I wasn't pregnant yet. We did consult a doctor but the result was that there was nothing wrong either of us. I talked to my husband sincerely about the absence of a baby in our marriage and I even told him to take another wife. My husband refused and he said that having or not having a child is in God’s hands and he is not bothered if no child is present in our marriage.

When marriage means procreation, the woman is usually the one who is burdened by childlessness. Self-blame among women is common and in this situation a woman may sacrifice herself by letting her husband take another

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53 The court will only grant the husband permission to take another wife if: a) the wife cannot perform her household duties appropriately; b) the wife has a bodily deformity or incurable disease; and c) the marriage is infertile.
wife, as experienced by Ina. Bennett (2015, p. 151) also indicated that “incompleteness” is the feeling most women described in experiencing infertility.

**Contraceptive Use**

There are several types of contraceptive methods used by my participants. The most popular method is Depo-Provera: an injection applied in the woman’s arm or buttck. The second preference is IUD (Intra Uterine Device), and others are the contraceptive pill and Norplant. Only one couple used condoms. There are couples who practise ‘traditional’ methods to prevent pregnancy, namely using the periodic calendar and ‘azl (coitus interruptus; withdrawal).

It is evident from the interviews that unintended pregnancies frequently happened among these women. Several women told me that unintended pregnancies had occurred when they did not wish for additional children, but at the same time they did not want to use contraception. Accordingly, the term ‘kebobolan’ (broken into, penetrated) emerged when talking about the number of children they have.

Three women, two of whom have twelve children and one with five children, decided not to practise contraception because they said after trying different methods, there is no suitable one and all have caused health complications. Many women also complained about the side effects to contraception: physical and psychological. One woman reported that her appetite changed and her libido was reduced after using the pill. Women who use Depo-Provera reported having irregular (or ceased) menses and weight gain. Women who used an IUD experienced bleeding. Many of the women wish to be released from the burden of using contraception.

Halimah (aged 31) is among those who experienced discomfort and pain after trying different types of contraception. She said:
At first I used an IUD, but I experienced continuous bleeding. Then, I tried an implant [Norplant], but I experienced a swollen arm. When I told the doctor what had happened, s/he said that the midwife had inserted the implant incorrectly and when it was taken out half of the implant was still left inside my skin [she showed me the bump in her arm].

She further expressed her resistance to contraception and complained to her husband, saying:

Why is it always me, the woman, who should suffer from all kinds of torture to my body? First, pregnancy, second, childbirth and then I have to use contraception. These are all painful and uncomfortable.

Halimah’s husband was concerned about her and wondered whether there was a contraceptive method that would not harm his wife. Halimah suggested that he use a condom, and subsequently they used condoms. Halimah’s resistance to using contraception occurred only after she had tried several different types unsuccessfully. Although in the end her husband was sympathetic to his wife’s condition, their story shows that the responsibility for reproduction is still mostly directed towards women.

In my research, the condom seemed unfamiliar to married couples in West Java as a contraceptive method. This was also reported by Kroeger (2000) and Newland (2001). Condoms are more popular among urban single young adults to practise safe sex and avoid HIV-AIDS (Purdy, 2006). There is a negative assumption related to condom use, in that it is usually associated not with contraception but with prostitution and disease prevention (Butt, 2005). It is also said that using condoms can reduce enjoyment during intercourse and men resist using it. Several women I interviewed, who had experienced physical complications when trying different methods of contraception, did not mention condoms as an alternative method. In many cases, women lack the power to suggest or negotiate with their husbands to use condoms. Halimah is the exception.

Male involvement in reproductive health is still low. In fact, men’s involvement in supporting family planning is important to facilitate the choice for the women
to make decision about reproduction. Several women I interviewed experienced discomfort with the cadre when they visited *posyandu* (health service post), as they were criticised for having too many children with too short an interval between births. In fact, several women informed me that it was their husbands who did not allow them to use contraception. Elis (aged 45) and Citra (aged 50) shared their stories, saying that their husbands prevent them from using contraception and thus, each year they had to give birth. Only after the fifth (Citra) and the seventh (Elis) did the husband allow them to use contraception. Citra said:

> At that time I was busy caring for the children and had no time for myself. I also quit my job because I did not have the time. In fact, my career was good at that time, and if I were still working I may already have a decent position now.

After childbirth women often experience an increase in body weight. Weight gain could decrease women’s self esteem and influence their sexual relationship. Thus getting back into shape post childbirth is popular in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, vaginal treatments and massage after giving birth are common practices. Traditional remedies like herbal concoctions (*jamu*) and tea, medical plants are consumed by women because they believe that these kinds of products tighten the vagina, reduce body size, enhance beauty and increase women’s energy (Roosita, Kusharto, Sekiyama, Fachrurozi, & Ohtsuka, 2008; Hilber et al., 2010).

**Sex**

Certainly, women’s experience with reproduction influences their interest in sex. During pregnancy, there is anxiety about their body changing, hormonal instability and the experience of childbirth, especially when it is the first time. Rosa (aged 44) said:

> During the first trimester of my pregnancy I did not like my husband touching me, but when I reached four months of my pregnancy, my libido increased significantly and made me desire to have sex often.
After childbirth, several women mentioned their decreasing interest in sex. These women stated that they still felt pain around their vagina after birth or feared another pregnancy while they still have a baby. Rani (aged 43) said:

After giving birth I felt unwilling to have sex. I was focused on my baby instead. I was afraid that if I had sex, I would get pregnant again while I still had a baby.

Sometimes husbands were unable to wait to have sex with their wives after menstruation or giving birth. In Islam, it is forbidden to have sex during menstruation and for 40 days after giving birth (called *nifas*). There is also the belief among men that after birth, the woman’s vagina is tight, just like a virgin’s. Therefore, they believe that the pleasure of intercourse (for men) after forty days of birth will be as good as on the first night. Rani and Sinta shared their stories:

If my husband sees me washing my hair as a sign that I have finished my period, he will directly ask to have sex. But I say that he needs to wait one more day after I have finished. Because, if he rushes to have sex, I usually experience more bleeding which makes my period last even longer. (Sinta)

My husband was working in another city. After I finished my *nifas* period my husband returned home and said he wanted to have sex. I refused to do so because I was afraid that I would get pregnant again. Also, I was not ready to use contraception. My husband was disappointed with my refusal. But later that night, when I had already fallen asleep, I felt warmth in my vagina. Then I realised that my husband had already penetrated me while I was sleeping. I could not do anything (to prevent it). It had already happened. (Rani)

Rani was not pleased with what her husband did that night. She was concerned about getting pregnant again while her baby was still small. She wanted to focus on one child first before having another. One month after that night, Rani recognised that she was pregnant and she was really mad at her husband. She wanted to get an abortion because she was not ready to have another child. In her

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54 *Nifas* is the period after giving birth when woman experience bleeding - usually until 40 days after giving birth. During this time, it is forbidden for a couple to have sex, until the bleeding stops.

55 In Islam, this is a purification that should be performed after menstruation (for women) or after having sex (for both partners). This purification includes pouring water to wash the body from head to toe.
small city, there were no midwives or other health practitioners who would agree to conduct an abortion. Rani then went to Jakarta to see her husband and they found a clinic where she got an abortion.

Seeking an abortion in Indonesia is not easy, especially without a ‘valid’ reason. In Islam, abortion is not strictly forbidden, but in certain circumstances, many Muslim scholars give permission for abortion. MUI’s (Indonesian Council of Ulama) fatwa in 2005 and Indonesian current law on abortion no. 61 of 2014 allows abortion not only when the physical state of the mother is jeopardised, but also when her psychological health is threatened, as in the case of rape and incest (Nasir & Asnawi, 2011; Mudzhar, 2014).

Reproduction affects sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is also influenced by stereotypes and gender norms and is related to power and inequality. For the women I interviewed, lack of power related to reproduction is an issue, in terms of decision-making to use or not to use contraception, health service accessibility and partner’s support. Women were burdened with the responsibility of reproduction. Better information concerning different methods of contraception and their side effects is needed. Women should be given full right to make decisions related to their bodies and supported by their husbands, especially in reproduction issues that affect their bodies, including women’s experience of aging.

**Aging and Menopause**

There are seven women in my sample who are in their late 40s and 50s and this section contains their stories in relation to their sexual experiences. There are changes in women’s bodies as they age. Experiencing menopause is much discussed by these women, although many seem not to understand what it means. The discussion of menopause in Indonesia is limited and information concerning this stage is also rare. Fatigue, illness and stiffness are the most common complaints that appeared in the interviews. These factors certainly

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56Detail discussion on abortion is provided in Chapter Two.
influence women’s sexual activity. Women refer to menopause when talking about their declining interest in sex. Research by Diah (2010) about the experience of menopause among urban middle class Malaysians stated that women who experience menopause experience hot flushes, night sweats, irregular menses and vaginal dryness. Vaginal dryness was also the main concern cited by my participants: it caused pain during intercourse. Many women said that the frequency of their sexual activity had decreased: some said it had decreased from three times a week to once a week; another said from twice a week to once a month or so, and another said she no longer has sex.

One woman (Rosa, aged 44) said:

Nowadays, I have really low interest in sex. It needs a really long time for me to be stimulated. I feel like my desire has died (mati). I was wondering could I be experiencing early menopause.

Wiwi (aged 47) said:

I must admit that at my age I still have sex with my husband. But, because we are getting older and often feel tired we can only do it approximately every three months.

Ita (aged 59) complained about her husband’s high sexual drive and said:

I was frantic (kewalahan) to comply with my husband’s sexual demands even at my age. He wants to do it whenever he feels like it. I often feel pain during intercourse because of vaginal dryness. My husband also complains because his penis hurts. Sometimes, he applies lotion to his penis before intercourse which I don’t like.

This experience had serious consequences for her. She often felt pain when she had intercourse and so did her husband. Neither of them enjoyed their sexual relations. Ita could not enjoy sex because she always felt pain, and her husband, who always wanted to have sex because of his high sexual drive, found that sex the did not satisfy him. Many times her husband forced her to have sex but Ita’s body could not comply with his demands because of fatigue, stiffness and pain. Until one day, Ita discovered that her husband was cheating on her and had taken another wife secretly (nikah siri). Ita admitted that she could no longer
serve her husband sexually as he demanded but his decision to take another wife secretly hurt her deeply.

The experience of Sandra (aged 57) is quite different from that of other women her age. She gave quite an interesting story about her sexual experience. She said: “I still have regular intercourse (didawamkan) with my husband twice a week.”

She explained that when she experienced menopause, she communicated to her husband her desire for regular intercourse. She argues that at her age, she might experience vaginal dryness and regular intercourse could prevent this. And it seems she has proven her theory: she never experiences any problems concerning her sexual life. Sandra argues that she maintains this sexual relation with her husband in order to keep a harmonious marriage. Nowadays, Sandra and her husband are enjoying their life and companionship. Sandra feels like she is re-living her courtship and she feels her relationship with her husband is closer than ever.

A different story is given by Minah (aged 50) who said:

For five years I haven’t had sex with my husband. We are old and weak. Especially my husband, he is 67 now and dislikes it if I touch him. He just wants to lie down undisturbed after a tiring day. We even sleep in separate beds.

Regardless of educational and economic background, many older couples mention that they consider themselves wiser now in their married relationships than when they were young. They said that they trust each other and support each other, especially when their children have left them to lead their own lives. They find their life more meaningful after so many years together.

Women experience sex in their older age and in their menopause differently. They have their own strategies in relation to their changing bodies, in particular related to sexual activity. Vaginal dryness is the most commonly experienced factor that makes women uncomfortable having sex with their husbands because it causes pain. Some women manage this pain by applying gel or lubrication, but some try to avoid having sex. To avoid vaginal dryness, one woman continues to
have regular sex and this works well for her. Fatigue, stiffness and illness are other factors that cause older women to decrease their sexual engagement with their husbands. The most important aspect of marriage for many older couples nowadays is companionship.

**The Possibility of Women’s Sexual Agency**

In this section I explore the possibilities for agency among women in their sexual relationships with their husbands. Among the 42 women I interviewed, there were only four whom I consider confidently showed their capacity to exercise agency. Following Ahearn (2001), this writing takes agency as “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112). In this case, the possible agency is the women’s capacity to act and to negotiate with their husbands in three aspects: firstly, lessening the husband’s dominance in sexual relationships; secondly, encouraging the husband to recognise women’s desire; thirdly, pursuing mutual pleasure.

In Indonesia the marital relationship has been made an asymmetric power relation supported by state laws, cultural norms and Islamic rules. Cultural norms and Islamic teachings are interrelated in regard to hierarchical relation between man and woman in Indonesia (Adamson, 2007; Munir, 2002). Men have the power to control women’s desire by deciding when and how to engage in sex, and women are expected to comply and serve their husbands. However, the diversity of women’s experiences and practices shows that some women are able to negotiate the prescriptions and conventions of marriage with their husbands. Within this context, agency is context-specific, in that it occurs in particular social circumstances that enable these women to exercise agency and may differ from one to another according to gender, class or ethnicity (Parker, 2005). It is only by considering the specific cultural context that one can gauge the meaning and importance of agency.

The heterosexual marital relationship is not always a relationship of dominance and subordination between husband and wife. Heterosexual relations also offer
the possibility of the recognition and fulfillment of women’s desires and
pleasures. Through negotiation and strategising, a few of the women could find
ways to resist domination to gain mutuality and satisfaction. The key way to
achieve this agency is to build communication between the spouses. Halimah (31,
Bachelor degree, Kindergarten Administrator) said:

I always discuss sex with my husband: what I want and what I do not
want. I am a normal human being and I also want to experience orgasm.
So, my husband tries hard to make me experience that. Sometimes, I feel
powerful when my husband gives up and fails to bring me to orgasm.
Later I will ask for compensation in the way of new jewelry or money.

Sandra (57, Master degree, lecturer) also said:

In my early years of marriage, I never experienced sexual enjoyment, and I
felt down about it and I asked myself why. Then I talked about it to my
husband and he understood and now we manage to achieve mutual
pleasure.

Halimah’s experience is quite exceptional compared to other women. There is an
ease of communication with her husband concerning sexual matters. They were
friends and got married after their university graduation. Halimah said that the
key aspect of happiness in marriage is sex. Thus, sex is important in marriage.
She and her husband always try to reach mutual satisfaction. Sandra, whose
husband was also a friend at university, was hesitant in her first years of
marriage to talk to her husband about her disappointment because she did not
experience sexual pleasure. However, Sandra often thought about it until she had
the courage to talk to her husband and he conformed to her demands of mutual
pleasure in sex. Having the opportunity to express desire and experience
pleasurable sex allowed Halimah and Sandra to manage harmonious marriage
relationships.

Agency takes form also by resisting normative social relations in marriage that
position women as passive subjects whose duty is only to fulfill the husband’s
needs. A few women I interviewed resisted either cultural norms or religious
prescriptions that advocate ‘appropriate’ sexual desire. These women demand
recognition of their sexual desire and mutual pleasure in sexual relationships.

Maya (41, Bachelor degree, kindergarten teacher) said:

I do not agree with the Sundanese proverb *istri mah dulang tinande* (a woman is like a big wooden rice bowl waiting to be filled. A husband should pay attention to how his wife is feeling when he wants to have sex. There is togetherness in sexual relationships and both partners should experience pleasure.

This proverb is popular among Sundanese, suggesting that the wife should obey the husband. However, Maya refused to be like the image described in the proverb, saying that the husband cannot assume the bowl will always be there, ready, willing and able to serve as he wants. Further she demanded mutuality in sex relationships.

Ida (36, finished high school, kindergarten teacher) also said:

I do not agree with the discussion in this book (she referred to *kitab uqud al lujayn*) especially concerning sexual relations: it’s indecent and shameful. I did not follow the guidance stated in this book for my marital relationships.

Ida who read the *uqud kitab* in *pesantren* dislikes the content of the *kitab* as well as the way the teacher explained it, especially as it privileges male sexual fulfillment in relationships. Tia (36, finished high school, teacher) even confronted her husband to claim her right to sexual fulfilment. She said:

I told my husband that in sexual relations, he should not care only about his own satisfaction, but he should hold it until I also reach climax. That was a Hadith I read in *pesantren*.

There are two steps in these women’s resistance. Firstly, they are resisting the prescribed cultural and religious norms of appropriate women’s sexual behaviour. Secondly, they operationalise their resistance by negotiating with their husbands so that the husbands acknowledge women’s desire and then the couple can achieve mutual satisfaction.

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57This is a classic Islamic book taught in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). It is about the marital relationship. The content mostly concerns how a wife should behave towards a husband: submissively and obediently. This is a very famous book and widely read in traditional *pesantren* in Indonesia. See Chapter Four for detail discussion of the content of this *kitab*. 
These women try to negotiate gendered power relations that instantiate male-centeredness in marital sexual relationships. These negotiation processes can be seen to follow what Kandiyoti called the “patriarchal bargain” (1988, p. 275). Bargaining with patriarchy means the women’s strategies to deal with male domination occurred within a particular context that enables them to do so (Kandiyoti, 1988). However, as she pointed out in her later article, this bargain has limitations because in many cases the normative discourse and hegemony remain dominant (Kandiyoti, 1998). This is quite true for my study. There are only a few women who can exercise agency within the dominant discourse of normative gender ideology. Although replacing this dominant ideology is not easy, it does not mean that it is impossible. Women’s consciousness and determination to resist unequal sexual relations can lead to mutual recognition of desire and respect. They speak up against the prevailing gender ideology and patriarchal structure to gain control over their body and to confirm their existence in their marital relationship as a subject and not merely an object of male desire.

Halimah (aged 31) further said:

I am not a product of the older generation who were told that it’s inappropriate to express desire openly and taught to be shy and passive in sexual relationships with the husband.

Maya (aged 41) also said:

I am no longer living in my mother’s era. I was born in modern times and such ‘taboo’ issues have been left behind. We discuss what I want and what he wants [sexually]: there is time to give and to get.

Halimah and Maya refused to follow the prescribed norm of femininity that says that women must be shy in relation to sex. In fact, they created their own sexual subjectivities that deserve to experience sexual pleasure and make active decisions related to sexual choice in marital relationships. These few women exercise a more muscular agency that is the “re-signification or the displacement of hegemonic meaning to create space for subversive gender practices” McNay (2008, p. 167).
In reality, the negotiation of power relations in marriage is not that easy for these women. They need courage and supportive conditions that enable them to do so. This negotiation process affects women’s personal feelings and risks the possible reaction of their husbands, who might support or reject their overture. Recognition of women’s desire should mean that the husband can accommodate women’s self expression, e.g. when women express that they want to have sex, they are free from being teased about their boldness (as experienced by Ina) or being rejected, experiencing embarrassment or denial (as experienced by Leli). Ina experienced being teased by her husband for initiating sex, while Leli felt rejected by her husband when she asked for intercourse. Although they said that their husband did not mean to humiliate them for their attempts, these experiences have made these women reluctant to initiate sexual relations ever again. Thus, successful negotiation needs male participation to support change in sexual relations which recognises women’s expression of sexual desire, as well as the need for mutuality and respect. Several husbands have been able to comprehend how to satisfy their wives, as noted by Leli. She experienced being rejected when she initiated sex, but in terms of fulfilling her desires, she feels her husband is considerate. Leli (aged 29) said:

My husband is a very understanding person. In relation to sex, he does not want to have pleasure before I experience it. So, timing is very important for us, we never do it when one of us is tired.

Siti (aged 40) also said that:

My husband will notice if I am in the mood or not, or when I feel tired or unwilling. He never forces me to do it (sex).

The partner’s support is important in providing space for women in negotiations related to their sexual preferences. A few women have enabled themselves to take a chance and speak out to their husbands about their sexual relationships. Based on the findings it is important to note the factors that facilitate the exercise of agency. Many of the more agentic women were educated and had known their husbands for quite some time before marriage. Thus, the changing marriage
patterns, i.e. the shift to peer, romantic and self choice marriage, and increased education should contribute to restructuring the gender and sexual relations in marital relationships.

It is also important to promote the promising suggestion of Kecia Ali (2006) who proposed the construction of a just sexual relationship with two main concerns: 1) “meaningful consent” and 2) “mutuality” which will bring about a respectful sexual relationship between the partners (Ali, 2006a, p. 151).

In this chapter, I presented the views of several women who consider sex in marriage as their right. They note that they have sexual desires that should be attended to by their husbands. They have the capacity to discuss and negotiate their preference in sexual positions and schedules. They also resisted the prescribed cultural norms and religious teachings of normative femininity. This chapter also explored women’s experiences of sex and of how reproduction – from menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, to menopause – affected their sexual desires. From the above explanations, women associate desire not merely with physical urges but also with social and emotional factors.

In this chapter, possible agency was observed among a few women. The women I presented in this section exercise agency in their sexual relationships with their husbands and this capacity was “interactively negotiated” (Ortner, 2006, p. 151) in daily life. The perceptions and behaviour of the women are still strongly shaped by cultural norms, legal regulations and religious prescriptions. However, it is important to present these few voices, with the hope that there will be a shift in belief and perception towards acknowledging women’s sexual and reproductive rights. This will facilitate women’s ability to decide their preference in sexual activities, to control their bodies and to have their sexual desire and pleasure recognised.
Chapter Nine
Women, Islamic Texts and Knowledge Construction

The Process of Acquiring Islamic Knowledge among Muslim Married Women

This chapter focuses on Islamic texts on marriage and sexuality that affect women’s perceptions and behaviour. It explores how the women acquired those texts and the topics covered in those texts. For the purpose of this writing I observed two sites considered authoritative in constructing and disseminating Islamic knowledge to the women, namely pesantren (Islamic boarding school) and majlis ta’lim (women’s religious study group). Most of the women mentioned these as the place where they acquired these texts or knowledge of the texts (Millie, 2011). By analysing these two sites, this chapter attempts to discover which texts are selected to be delivered/studied in these two sites. This chapter also demonstrates how the dissemination of the texts is influenced by the personal and intellectual background of the preachers and the kyai. This chapter explores the link between the women’s knowledge of Islamic teachings and their perceived behaviour in the broader context of the construction of Islamic knowledge in Indonesia.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first discusses the places where most women learn Islamic knowledge related to marriage and sexuality, namely pesantren and majlis ta’lim. The second part of this chapter describes the Islamic texts mentioned by the women during their interviews and their understanding of those texts. In this section, I will also mention some texts related to the discussions that were rarely, or never, mentioned by my participants. I will show that there are relevant texts that are unfamiliar to them, with the aim of providing a counter-balance to the texts they mentioned. This study will also seek to uncover why some texts are favoured over others, and the political interests of the Muslim authorities in the dissemination of Islamic teachings on marriage and sexuality in Indonesia. By political interest I mean the power
relations involved in religious knowledge production (Foucault, 1990): how knowledge and ideas are distributed in society, by whom and for what purpose. The third part of this chapter provides an alternative reading of Islamic texts on marriage and sexuality to provide a balanced understanding of those texts. This chapter also provides an example of an NGO in empowering the rural community focused on reproductive and sexuality rights.

In this chapter I am employing an Islamic feminist hermeneutical approach to interpret the Islamic texts. This approach emphasises the importance of interpreting texts by considering the socio-historical context in which they were revealed and written, rather than focusing exclusively on the texts themselves. Detailed discussion on the hermeneutical approach is provided in Chapter Three.

There are five pesantren and six majlis ta’lim that I visited near the site of my fieldwork in Eastern Bandung.  When I visited the majlis ta’lim, I participated in the activities. In the pesantren, I interviewed the kyai (leader of the pesantren).

**Pesantren: The Process of Knowledge Construction**

My aim here is not to give a detailed history or description of pesantren (Dhofier, 1980; Rahardjo, 1985), but to document the transmission of knowledge in pesantren that involves women. The Pesantren has an important role in knowledge production and construction of Islamic teachings. The five pesantren I visited were established in the Dutch colonial period and date back to the 1930s.

These five pesantren are connected to each other by family lines, marriage or student-teacher relationships. It is a tradition among kyai to construct a strong network among pesantren by marrying endogamously among the pesantren families (Dhofier, 1980). A pesantren usually starts with a small group of people studying classical Islamic textbooks in a small mushala (praying hall) or mosque. Then the group grows, with participants coming from other regions and cities. As the group grows, the kyai build permanent housing, usually a dormitory, for the students to stay near the mushala, and often the mushala becomes a fully
fledged mosque. The founders of the five pesantren around Bandung were people who had a strong commitment to Islamic education, had gained knowledge from other pesantren in nearby towns like Banten and Garut, and had financial capacity.

Almost all the pesantren I visited are affiliated with NU (Nahdatul Ullama, the largest and one of the most prominent Muslim organisations in Indonesia), although not so much with the organisational structure as with their religious practices. All of the pesantren can be categorised as salafiyyah\(^{58}\) (pesantren salaf; traditional) as opposed to pesantren khalaf (modern) (Lukens-Bull, 2010, p. 10). In pesantren salaf they continue the tradition of studying the classical Islamic textbooks known as kitab kuning (lit. yellow books, as they are printed on yellow paper). Kitab kuning are not uniquely Indonesian in origin. They were written on Arabic coloured paper and many were brought from the Middle East in the early 20\(^{th}\) century by kyai who visited Mecca for pilgrimage (Van Bruinessen, 1990, 1994).

All the pesantren in the study site catered only for male students (santri putra) in their early development. The reason given was that there was limited dormitory space available. Research by Jackson and Parker (2008, p. 27) provides data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs that showed the students enrolled in pesantren in 2005 of all levels was 53.2 percent for male and 46.8 percent for female. The higher ratio of male to female students in many pesantren can be traced back to the history of their first establishment, catering exclusively for males. Nowadays, four of the pesantren I visited also accept female students (santri putri) and one pesantren is preparing to accept female students by next year. In some pesantren, female students outnumbered males (75% female santri to 25% male santri in

\(^{58}\)The terms pesantren salafiyah (salaf) should be differentiated from pesantren salafi. Pesantren salafi and the salafi movement follow the Wahhabi teachings of Saudi Arabia. The salafi movement is a fundamentalist Islamic movement which has recently gained popularity in Indonesian Islam. The salafi understanding of Islam is quite conservative, with an absolute and strict understanding of the Qur’an and sunna (Van Bruinessen, 2008; Hasan, 2007).
pesantren Al-Robi’ and Al-Khamis). Social change, the opportunity for women to pursue education and the changing awareness of the kyai about the significance of education for women, have all contributed to this increase in female students.

With the high demand for safe and affordable accommodation for university students, these pesantren opened their doors to accept santri studying at university and each year their numbers have been increasing significantly. Recently, the majority of pesantren in my study site began accepting only santri studying at university and because of this, these pesantren are called pesantren mahasiswa (university student pesantren). These pesantren are located alongside universities: secular and Islamic, state owned and private in Eastern Bandung. Thus many students search for accommodation in pesantren rather than rented rooms/houses (kamar kost/rumah kontrakan). The reason these students choose to live in the pesantren is to deepen their religious knowledge, as well as to save on the cost of accommodation. Accommodation in the pesantren costs less than a rented room. For example, each month in pesantren al-Robi’ the santri only have to pay around 25,000 to 35,000 rupiah a month for electricity and maintenance, compared to renting a room for 250,000 to 500,000 rupiah a month.

Pesantren activities start in the evening around 6pm, with the communal Maghrib prayer until 9pm, and then begins again in the early morning with the subuh prayer at 4.30am, followed by learning the kitab until 6am, when they prepare to go to university.

In terms of the curriculum in these pesantren, the kyai has the authority to decide which kitab should be learned and which should not, in accordance with the dominant and already established characteristics of salafiyyah pesantren in Indonesia and the kyai’s interests and special expertise. However, as I observed, most of these pesantren have a similar curriculum of kitab. As in most other

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59All of the pesantren and kyai names are pseudonyms.
pesantren salaf, the subjects taught in these pesantren can be categorised into various Islamic disciplines, namely:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject (Islamic discipline)</th>
<th>Name of kitab learnt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tawhid</strong> (Islamic monotheism)</td>
<td>Tijan, Syu’bul Iman, Fathul Majid and Jauhar al-tawhid;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fiqh</strong> (Islamic jurisprudence)</td>
<td>Safinatunnaja, Sulam al-tawfiq, Fathul Qarib, Fathul Mu’in, Iqna’, and Kifayatul Akhyar;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nahwu</strong> (syntax)</td>
<td>Jurumiyyah, Imritti, Mutamimmah and Alfiyah;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharaf</strong> (inflection)</td>
<td>Amshillah Tashrif, Kailany, and Nadhom Maksud;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Akhlak/adab</strong> (morality/etiquette)</td>
<td>Ta’lim Muta’alim, Sulamunnajat, Akhlaqu lil Banat and Akhlaqu lil Banin;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hadith</strong></td>
<td>Riyadl as-Salihin and Min Kunuzissunnah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tafsir al-Qur’an</strong> (Qur’anic exegesis)</td>
<td>Tafsir al-Jalalain, Fathul Mu’in, Tafsir Munir, al-sya’rawi and Sofwatuttafasir.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two methods of studying kitab kuning in these pesantren: sorogan (individual reading) and balagan (group reading). In sorogan, the person can choose any kitab kuning that s/he wishes to study and read. For the balagan, it is the kyai who chooses which kitab should be read.

The pesantren is a place where knowledge is produced and reproduced, with the aim of maintaining the tradition of salafiyyah. Oral transmission of knowledge is important in this learning process (Millie, 2008). Criticism of the content of the kitab is avoided and is in fact taboo. The main concern is with the literal meaning which is ascertained by annotating the text word by word; this process is called ngalogat.

In each pesantren the students are usually divided into three groups: group A is the beginners (Arabic. *mubtadi’*) who have just started learning kitab kuning; group B is intermediate (*mutawassith*), and group C is the advanced learners (*muta’ally*). The teachers who teach and assist the learning process are usually the

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60 For more detail and extensive discussion on kitab kuning used in pesantren in Indonesia see research by Van Bruinessen (Van Bruinessen, 1990).
ustadz (teacher) who have dedicated themselves to that pesantren, or the more senior santri who are already at an advanced level.

Guidance related to marriage and sexuality is available in fiqh (jurisprudence) under the heading of kitab/bab al-nikah (chapter/section on marriage) and only available in the intermediate to advanced level. Fiqh is considered the main subject of pesantren curriculum as it is related to everyday guidance (Van Bruinessen, 1990). Kitab fiqh usually begins with the chapter of thaharah (purification) and the discussion of marriage is available in the second half of the kitab (underlined) (see figure 7 from Fathul Qorib by Ibn Qasim al-Ghazzi-d. 918/1512). The students read from the first chapter through to the last.

Figure 7: Content of kitab kuning on marriage

Front page Content of the kitab Chapter on marriage (underlined)

The popular kitab kuning in the pesantren that specifically discuss marriage and sexual relations are kitab Uqud al-Lujain by Nawawi al-Bantani and Qurratul ‘Uyun by As-Somdani Abi Muhammad al-Tihami. These kitab are learnt by santri in the advanced level. Kitab Uqud al-Lujain is learned as a chosen kitab in three pesantren: Al-Thani, al-Thalis and al-Robi’, and is offered by individual ustadz or to acquiesce to students’ requests. Some students in pesantren al-Robi’ and al-Khomis read Qurratul Uyun as sorogan. However, the kyai in pesantren al-Khomis
teach more recent kitab on marital sexual relations, called Kitab Liqa Binal al-Zaujayn by Abdul Qadir Ahmad ‘Atha, published in 1980. This kitab, according to the kyai, is quite new and no other pesantren use it. Interestingly, after I informed the kyai in pesantren al-Khomis about the topic of my thesis, he noted that: “sexual satisfaction influences the intelligence of the child born.” He further explained that it is important to achieve sexual pleasure for both partners. In contrast to all other kyai in my area, the kyai of pesantren al-Khomis is quite progressive in his opinions about marital relationships, the teaching methods and the kitab used in his pesantren.

Kitab Uqud al-Lujain, which was written by syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani from Banten, is a popular kitab on marital relationships between wife and husband. During my fieldwork, many women I interviewed referred to this kitab as their Islamic guidance for their marital relationships. However, gender bias is clearly present in the content of this kitab, which privileges men over women in marital relationships and demands that women be completely submissive and obedient to the husband. This kitab also emphasises that marital sex is the wife’s duty and the husband’s right: the wife should comply whenever the husband demands it, and never refuse him because refusal is considered a sin. Kitab Qurratul ‘Uyun specifically discusses marital sexual relationships related to sexual positions, times and foods to increase sexual desires.61

Kitab that contain gender bias are many and they are not criticised when they are read in pesantren. That is why pesantren are seen as maintaining the patriarchal system (Mas’udi, 1993). Because of this, women learn a certain Islamic discourse of femininity. Critical thinking is not encouraged and discussion is not the main method in this learning process. Research by Srimulyani (2007, p. 88) reports that in pesantren that cater specifically to girls, there is a strong emphasis on moral and religious values, including an interpretation of femininity that prepares

61 Detailed discussions of the content of these three kitab are provided in Chapter Four in the section of Source of Knowledge about Marriage and Sexuality.
women to “morally and religiously be… a good wife and a good mother for the future generation.”

It is quite difficult to break the patriarchal values embedded in the kitab text, although that does not mean it is impossible. Certain efforts have been initiated by gender activists with a pesantren background (female and male) to establish gender awareness in the pesantren (Van Doorn-Harder, 2006). FK3 (Kitab Kuning Study Forum), P3M (Association for the Development of Pesantren and Society), Rahima and the Fahmina Institute are examples of NGOs that promote gender equality in the pesantren, and some conduct critical discussion of the gender bias contained in the kitab kuning. Changes in pesantren concerning gender equality should be started by members of the specific pesantren. In this case the roles of kyai, nyai (kyai’s wife) and the teacher are important in increasing awareness of gender equality (Srimulyani, 2012; Smith & Woodward, 2013; Kholifah, 2014).

The pesantren is the main institution that promotes a traditional gender relationship, and it will remain as such as long as the traditional curriculum, with its kitab kuning, is read uncritically. In order to change this patriarchal tradition, critical thinking, rather than passive and receptive reading, should be employed.

The pesantren is an established Islamic institution in Indonesia and has contributed to the education system, as well as providing progressive discussion on democracy and pluralism (Sirry, 2010). However, pesantren also continue to promote and sustain normative gender relationships, especially marital relationships that promote the husband’s authority and the wife’s obedience. The so-called ‘traditional’ pesantren that specialise in salafiyyah’s method of preserving the traditional chain of knowledge, with the kitab kuning as the main textbook corpus, survive despite the emergence of modern pesantren (pesantren khalaf) that adopt modern curricula and offer formal Islamic education like primary (Madrasah Ibtida’iyyah-MI), secondary (Madrasah Tsanawiyah – MTs) and high school (Madrasah Aliyah-MA). The kitab kuning which are taught in ‘traditional’ pesantren still have high status as the authority for Islamic learning that influences the knowledge construction of Muslim men and women in Indonesia. Reading
these classical texts in a contemporary context should entail critical thinking about each text. *Kitab kuning* should be regarded as historical texts that emerged at a specific time and context. Thus, their authoritative status should be regarded as temporary and not absolute.

**Majlis Ta’lim (Women’s Religious Study Groups): Exercising Religious Piety**

This section describes two different types of *majlis ta’lim* (women’s religious study groups): *majlis ta’lim* attached to the *pesantren*, and *majlis ta’lim* attached to specific mosques. There are four *majlis ta’lim* I observed that are attached to *pesantren* and two *majlis ta’lim* that functioned as a part of mosque activities. In Sundanese, this religious gathering is also called *pangaosan* (Ind. *pengajian*), derived from *ngaos* (Ind. *ngaji*) which means “recite”, especially to recite the Qur’an. The term *pangaosan*, however, can refer to any religious study gathering that involves an audience of men and women; while *majlis ta’lim* specifically refers to women’s religious study gatherings (Marcoes, 1992).

*Majlis ta’lim* is a common phenomenon that can be seen all over Indonesia, with different methods of learning and types of activities employed in efforts to increase women’s religious knowledge. The most common method is listening to the preaching of the preacher/kyai, without taking notes about the message being delivered. Thus, oral transmission of knowledge is important in the *majlis ta’lim* learning process (Millie, 2011; Gade, 2004). The audience relies only upon their listening ability and their memory of the discussion. In other regions of West Java, *majlis ta’lim* is also called *bandungan* which means ‘listening’ (Ind. *mendengarkan*).

*Pesantren* are also involved in *majlis ta’lim* and *pangaosan rutin* (regular religious preaching) for the wider community surrounding the *pesantren*. *Pangaosan ibu-ibu* (*majlis ta’lim*) is scheduled in the morning, usually between eight o’clock to eleven o’clock. The schedule of *pangaosan ibu-ibu* at each *pesantren* differs in day and does not conflict with the *pangaosan* schedule in other *pesantren*. For example
in pesantren al-Thani it is conducted on Thursday (Sund. Kemis; Ind. kamis) so usually it is called kemiisan; in pesantren Al-Ula it is held on Monday; and in pesantren Al-Robi’ it is held on Friday.

The different days for pangaosan in each pesantren allows participants to attend each pangaosan. As I observed, the participants of one pangaosan are almost always the same people who attend other pangaosan. The distance between pesantren is about one kilometer along a busy street. Research by Millie (2011) also suggests that women attend four to five pangaosan per week, more than do men.

The pangaosan usually begin with sholawatan, yasinan, recitation of certain prayers, and the main program of preaching from the kyai. As I observed, in all majlis ta’lim the women read from a single textbook they hold, which is called majmu’ syarief (the compilation of the respectable). It is written in Arabic and some versions include its Latin script, with Indonesian translation. Majmu’ syarief is a compilation of Arabic texts containing selected Qur’anic surah and prayers accompanied by explanation on the virtue (faidah) of reading those surah and prayers that are believed to have beneficial affect in the daily life of the reader (do’a-do’a mustajab). Sholawatan are the prayers containing praise for the Prophet Muhammad. They are read rhythmically while waiting for latecomers to arrive. The women arrive at different times depending on when they can finish their housework. As all the recitations are in Arabic, many of the women do not understand the meanings as they recite by rote. These women memorised many prayers and verses from this majmu’. All of these activities are led by women of the pesantren family, either the nyai (the kyai’s wife) or the kyai’s sister. These activities take about two hours, until the main part of the pengaosan is started by the kyai. The kyai is the only one who delivers the sermon for this pangaosan each week.

The audiences of the pangaosan are Muslim women, mostly married, in their 40s and older. Most come from middle and lower socio-economic backgrounds and
many are housewives. In my observations, only a few of the women were from middle or higher levels of socio-economic background. They could be identified by their dress and the respectful greetings of other attendees. Sometimes, the seating arrangements are different to accommodate them in the front rows or in the left or right side of the podium.

In majlis ta’lim the women sit on a carpet or mat (tikar) on the floor. Some of the women bring along goods to sell and try to sell from where they are sitting among the attendees while (listening) to the recitation or preaching. The women offered various products: from different types of foods to clothes and accessories. For these women, pangaosan are seen not only as a way to increase religious knowledge but also a place for economic gain. One pesantren popular for its pangaosan attracts around 300 attendees who come from all around the area. During this pangaosan (every Thursday), a ‘temporary market’ (pasar kaget) is established by petty traders who come especially to trade in this location. The narrow road to the pangaosan venue becomes crowded with pedestrians, traders and vehicles. There is a stark difference in the road to the pangaosan site in pesantren al-Thani on Thursday, when there is pangaosan, and other days (see figure 8).

Figure 8: The road to pesantren al-Thani

The road to pesantren al-Thani on non-pangaosan days

On Thursday
During the *kyai*’s message, I observed that some of the women would listen attentively to the content delivered by the *kyai*; some would be half asleep; others would hold conversations with the women next to them; while others tried to bargain and trade. The *kyai* requires good communication skills and strategies to attract and keep the attendees’ interest. The *kyai* reminds the attendees to keep focused and avoid boredom by making jokes, singing, and speaking in a loud voice. In research by Millie (2008; 2011) in another region in West Java, the *kyai* also use Sundanese *tembang* (sung verse) of different stanza forms (*pupuh*) to attract the attendees’ attention.

The ability of the preacher to communicate Islamic knowledge to the audiences is influenced by his educational background which impacts on his reputation. According to Marcoes (1992, p. 212), a *kyai* who is well-liked by the audience is one who has the ability to “*ngadagel, ngadalil jeung ngadumel* (to make jokes, to use appropriate scriptural quotations and to voice social protest)”. 

The topics of *pangaosan* are mostly related to *tawhid* (The oneness of God), *aqidah* (the belief system), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and marital relationships. A *kyai* in pesantren al-Thani and al-Khomis mentioned that the main aim of the *pangaosan* is strengthening the *tawhid* among the listeners, advising them on how to worship God correctly and how they should leave local animism behind.

Apart from increasing Islamic knowledge, the aim of the women attending the *pangaosan* is also to socialise with other women and to make new friends. One woman said: “it is better to attend this kind of *pangaosan* than to sit at home and be overwhelmed by the complexities (*keruwetan*) of life.” Another woman compared her attendance at *pangaosan* to the way a plant needs to be watered to stay fresh and allow it to grow; similarly, she is nourished by attending the *pangaosan*. Another woman beside her agreed, saying that the heart needs to be filled with spiritual knowledge to cool it down from the various problems faced in everyday life. This spiritual cleansing (*siraman rohani*) would make them strong and optimistic. The *pesantren* is a trusted place for ordinary people to
acquire Islamic knowledge through regular *pangaosan* where they can participate. Millie (2008) showed that this kind of *pangaosan* for *orang awam* (non-specialists) is a ritual event that established *pesantren* as the symbol of religious tradition and authority and as a place where ordinary people can express and strengthen their faith.

The *kyai* is the leader of the *pesantren* (in West Java *kyai* are also called *ajengan*) and has charisma and high social prestige in the community. The role of the *kyai* in the community is not merely as an expert in Islamic knowledge who gives advice on religious matters, but historically speaking, the *kyai* has also been seen as a leading figure in the Indonesian revolution against colonialism (Dhofier, 1980). Horikoshi (1976) reported on the various roles of the *kyai*, showing that the *kyai* in rural areas are charismatic characters who give guidance on spiritual and mystical issues. They are also expected to solve community problems in regards to social change. Geertz (1960) also mentioned several roles of the *kyai*, calling them ‘a cultural broker’ who acts as “spiritual advisor, magical curer and social superior” (p. 234). In *pesantren* in semi-urban areas that I observed, the charismatic figure of the *kyai* remains the key attraction for students and attendees of his *pangaosan*. All of the *kyai* I observed were also believed to be persons with the perceived ‘authority’ to cure certain diseases, prevent misfortune and facilitate successful achievements of the members of the community around them.

*Ngalap barakah* (to gain divine good fortune) is what motivated *pangaosan* attendees to come from all areas surrounding the *pesantren*. They brought drinking water bottles to be put in front of where the *kyai* was expected to recite prayers. The attendees believed that by drinking that water, their hopes would be realised. When the sermon finished, the women, especially those in the front rows, would approach the *kyai* and shake his hands, passing him an envelope containing money.
These donations were not seen as a part of mosque activities at two of the majlis ta’lim. These two majlis ta’lim were organised by the same woman, Ibu Citra (aged 50), who is also the sub-district leader of majlis ta’lim. Unlike the pangaosan described above, this majlis ta’lim is well organised, involving all members of the pengajian. They are not passive attendees who just come, sit, recite, and listen. Each week, there are certain members appointed responsible for the assembly: one to be a master of ceremony, one to recite the Qur’an, and one to read its translation. Each person takes a turn. Around 20 to 30 women attended these majlis ta’lim, fewer than for the pangaosan in the pesantren that attract 50 to 300 attendees. Unlike the majlis ta’lim attached to the pesantren, where the main preacher is the kyai, the preachers at these two majlis ta’lim come from diverse backgrounds and are not necessarily the kyai. Some of them are male and female scholars, lecturers, students, and community leaders.

According to Ibu Citra, there are various activities conducted in her majlis ta’lim, which emphasise not only learning and reciting the Qur’an, mainly done inside the mosque, but also activities outside the mosque such as running courses to increase skills for the members of pangaosan, nature exploration, charity events, and a Qur’an recitation competition for the members.

The sermons delivered in majlis ta’lim are mostly about worship, the after-life, marital relationships, Islamic virtues and social interactions. The material for the sermons are taken from various sources, many of which are from the kitab kuning, like Dzurratun Nasihin (The Compilation of Advices), Safinatun Najah (Islamic Jurisprudence) and many others. They explain praying (shalat), fasting (puasa), forgiveness (memaafkan), patience (sabar), acceptance (ikhlas), alms (sedekah), caring (tolong menolong) and repentance (taubat) for enhancing piety. Topics pertaining to marital relationships also dominate the preaching in majlis ta’lim, specifically related to parenting (caring for and educating of children), organising the household and wife-husband relationships. Advice about the proper conduct of these relationships is directed at women, as women are the safeguards of the family. The content of the sermon guides women on what they should do and
what they should not do. One woman even said to me that she was disappointed at the topics delivered in majlis ta’lim, which mostly asked women to be sabr (patient), and ikhlas (accepting) in relation to the problems they face in marriage, for the sake of the children and peace in the community. These topics feature repeatedly in majlis ta’lim. The woman who complained wanted discussions more related to the problems of women in everyday life and ideas on how to solve these problems. Many majlis ta’lim promote conventional female virtues justified by religious texts: modesty, obedience and self-sacrifice in relation to children and family.

In a focus group discussion, many women complained about this instructive message directed at them. One woman, Edah (aged 43) said:

> We (women) attend many religious gatherings that teach proper conduct related to the family: how to interact with our husbands, take care of the children and maintain the household. We are fed up with that knowledge—we are already experts because that’s what we do every day. By contrast, I am wondering whether men in their religious gatherings are also being advised to do the same—on how to behave with proper conduct toward the family, the children and the household? I doubt it. If we want a harmonious family, the same knowledge should be given to husbands as well because many problems related to the household are also triggered by the husband.

A kyai of pesantren al-Ula also affirmed that:

> When I deliver sermons concerning marital relationships to the women of pengajian, it is ineffective, because the husbands are not given the same information. It is unbalanced. The best way is to give the same advice and knowledge to both partners on how to create a harmonious married life.

The majlis ta’lim generally represented the marital relationship according to normative gender roles and relations: that the wife should obey her husband because of his role as breadwinner and head of the family (kepala rumah tangga). Research by Winn (2012, p. 19) suggests that majlis ta’lim in Leihitu, Ambon, work in “reiterating normatively gendered forms of religious practice” besides mastering fluency in Arabic recitation. This is also true for majlis ta’lim in Eastern
Bandung: I would argue they do not just *reiterate* but also *strengthen* gendered norms of religious practices and knowledge.

In Indonesia, women play an important role in religious life. Women are not exempt from public life and acquiring religious knowledge. They organise religious activities in the mosque through *majlis ta’lim*. There are various activities performed in *majlis ta’lim* including preaching, studying the Qur’an, reciting, praying, doing charity and so on. The activities vary from one *majlis ta’lim* to another. I would argue that there is no doubt that *majlis ta’lim* in Indonesia allow women to claim public space, enhance religious knowledge and exercise religious piety, as noted by Frisk (2009) in Malaysia and Mahmood (2001) in Egypt. In Malaysia, Frisk (2009) reported that these kinds of religious activities in the mosque give women space within the male-dominated environment and create agency, as they can shape women’s opinions concerning such texts. Similarly, Mahmood (2001) argues that the women’s mosque movement gives opportunities for women to experience Islamic piety: maintaining their modesty and shyness and devotion as Muslims. The topics given in the mosque movement in Egypt like *sabr* (patience) and *taqwa* (righteousness) are taken up by the women as survival strategies for daily life.

However, in terms of the religious messages provided, particularly about marital relationships, *majlis ta’lim* promotes the ideal normative women’s behaviour in patriarchal society justified by religious texts. Women are advised to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the family, with the lure of reward in the afterlife (*pahala*) for their patience and obedience toward their husbands. Submitting to God is the answer to the problems faced by women, and unluckiness is considered their fate (*nasib*), their destiny (*takdir*). It is hard, in this context, not to see *majlis ta’lim* as sustaining patriarchal values. It is true that through *majlis ta’lim*, women have the opportunity to increase their religious knowledge, learn the Qur’anic text, master Arabic recitation, and exercise piety as Muslims. However, the analysis should go beyond just claiming the space, and extend to the content and value of religious prescription disseminated to the women in the
process of meaning construction that still privileges men’s position in their daily life. In this case, majlis ta’lim transmit and facilitate the male bias by making use of religious texts as a way of strengthening the patriarchal chain. Majlis ta’lim offers temporary relief from their unresolved problems through social interaction, and perhaps comfort in their own piety, but because of their inability to challenge the existing conditions women cannot actually resolve their problems other than by acceptance and submission to God. Religion becomes an excuse for helplessness when no other solution is available. In my opinion this is un-empowered escape, an enforced surrender to religious devotion. In this case, women’s piety is politicised or used as a means of strengthening the politics of patriarchy (Deeb, 2009).

The difference in women’s attitudes in regards to marriage, before and after attending the pengajian, is demonstrated by Rani and Tuti:

   Early in my marriage, I often refused to have sex with my husband if I wasn’t in the mood. Nowadays, since I became actively engaged in pengajian, even when I’m not keen on having sex, I don’t refuse him, because it is my duty and I am afraid of sin (takut berdosa). (Rani, aged 43)

   I know from pengajian that refusing your husband’s sexual need is a sin in Islam, I did not know about that until I attended pengajian. Before that, I often refused my husband if I was unwilling to (have sex). (Tuti, aged 55)

Majlis ta’lim facilitated women’s capacity to act, in terms of providing an opportunity to acquire religious knowledge. However, at the same time, they hindered women because women were surrounded by religious teachings that advised them to safeguard the family by sacrificing their desire in the name of what Sabbah (1984, p. 3) criticised as “the criteria of the beauty in Islam: silence, immobility, and obedience.”

The role of majlis ta’lim is significant in disseminating Islamic texts on marital relationships, most of which subordinate women (Hamdanah, 2005). Even the female preachers promote such topics and rarely do they discuss awareness of women’s rights in Islam (see also Marcoes, 1992). I argue that there is a need to reformulate the topics and content of majlis ta’lim to make them provide more
enlightened information for the women. In addition, it is time for the preachers in *majlis ta’lim*, both male and female, to provide gender-balanced references of Islamic texts, promoting the spirit of gender equality.

**The Islamic Texts on Marriage and Sexuality and Women’s Understanding**

This section discusses the Islamic texts relating to marriage and sexuality that were mentioned by my female participants. As I mentioned above, when I refer to ‘texts’ I am referring to various sources and not necessarily to a single Islamic written source. When mentioning Islamic sources, the women usually mentioned the books/kitab they had read, the pengajian they had attended or the pesantren (kyai) at which they had studied. Many of them could not differentiate whether the texts they recited were the Qur’an or the Hadith or simply the opinion of the kyai or ustadz. They often just said vaguely, “According to Islam it is said so and so …”, or they said, “In the Hadith it is said…”, but in fact it was the Qur’an. The women frequently mixed up the sources from which the texts they mentioned were obtained.

It is understandable that these women quoted the source or the text incorrectly because many of them relied only on oral transmission of knowledge while in pengajian or pesantren. In this chapter I locate the texts mentioned by my participants in their correct source: the Qur’an, Hadith, or simply the words/opinions of local kyai and ustadz.

The analysis of the religious texts related to marriage and sexual relations aims at understanding how the women make use of these texts as their guide in their marital relationships and how important these texts are in influencing their relationships.

**The Qur’an**

Several women cited chapter 4 verse 34 of the Qur’an:

*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women (Al-rijalu qawwasuna ala al-nisa)*, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and
because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) chastise them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).\(^{62}\) (my emphasis, Q. 4:34)

The majority of women I interviewed unanimously mentioned that the husband is the head of the family and refer to this verse in their argument. However, many of them only cited the first part of the verse (in Italics). This is the main advice they received on their wedding day: it is stated in the marriage sermon. No matter how the wife contributes to family income or what level her education status, the main principle of marriage for Indonesian women still applies: to serve her husband.

For example, Sari (aged 42, with a PhD), a director of a study program at a university, mentioned, “At home, I position myself as an ordinary housewife (ibu rumah tangga biasa). I serve my husband, like getting him a drink when he returns home from work.” When I prompted her with the question, how about if she is also tired from working and returns home, does he ever get her a drink? She just said defensively that usually it is she who comes home earlier, meaning that it would be unusual for a husband to serve the wife. This is to imply that no matter how prestigious her public achievements, at home Sari’s position is as a mere housewife whose main duty is serving her husband. Many Indonesians also believe that a career woman can be anything in public as long as she does not neglect her main role as a wife and mother (Nilan & Utami, 2008).

Another woman, Sandra (aged 57), when referring to this verse, stated that the authority of the husband is also related to the sexual relationship:

In terms of our sexual relationship, I never initiate having sex, I feel embarrassed (malu) to do so because I am a woman. Besides, my husband believes that the verse ‘arrijalu qowwamun ala an-nisa’ (men are the protectors and maintainers of women) also applies to sexual relations.

\(^{62}\)For the Qur’anic translation, I use the English translation of Muhammad Yusuf Ali as it is the most widely used English translation worldwide.
The implication of her statement is that her husband would not be pleased if Sandra initiated sex, because according to Sandra’s husband it is the job of the husband to initiate sex as the leader of the household.

Another woman, Mala (aged 40), also mentioned this verse. However, she had an interesting comment:

There are times when I regarded my husband as the leader of the family, but there are also times when I considered him an equal partner (*mitra sejajar*) in married life. It depends on the situation.

Heni (aged 51) also has an alternative understanding with regards to this verse. She explained:

Men are the head of the family under the conditions as stated in that verse. Thus, when the husband cannot provide financial support and the task is taken over by the wife, he is no longer the head of the family.

This verse is widely used by men and women alike to refer to and to justify an absolute authority of male over female, especially in marital relationships that oblige women to be obedient. However, many only cited this verse partially – just the italicised text – and did not mention the rest of the verse which clearly states the conditions which enable male authority over female: *fadala* (preference) and *nafaqa* (maintenance).

Iis (aged 40), who experienced domestic violence from her husband, has a different opinion about this verse and challenged the absolute power of the husband in marriage. She said:

We should define first what kind of husband deserves obedience from his wife and what kinds of command should be followed. I do not always comply with what my husband orders me to do, it depends on the context. Just like in sex, Islam does not prescribe that a couple should have sex every day, like my husband demands. But, I also fear that if I don’t obey his command, he will betray me for another woman. That’s what I see in my neighbourhood.

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63 Detailed discussion of this verse is provided in Chapter Two.
Uum (aged 35) also resisted using this verse as male justification for absolute power in marriage. She reported that whenever her husband demanded to have sex with her, but she felt unwilling to do so, her husband would say, ‘I have power (aku berkuasa) over you’. At that time Uum could not refuse, but later on Uum declared that a husband’s power in marriage has limits, including in sex. There should be no power for a husband who is violent or does not financially support his wife and the family, which is what her husband always did to her.

In practice, although women unanimously agreed that the husband is the head of the family and the wife is expected to be obedient to him in married life, they could compromise, and even resist absolute guardianship and obedience. There are women who submit passively to the prescriptions, but many others resisted, arguing that the husband’s power has limits under certain conditions such as the inability to support the family, and bad or violent behaviour, such that the wife may not obey his commands. The reality faced by these women in their interactions with their husbands enhanced their understanding of this verse and caused them to argue against their husband’s absolute authority. Iis and Uum challenged their husbands, who used religious texts to justify their violent behaviour in claiming sex.

Another Qur’anic verse on marriage and sexuality that was usually used by males to justify their behaviour is about polygyny:

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, *marry women of your choice, two or three or four;* but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice. (Q. 4: 3)

Many men declared that this verse gives them permission to take another wife. This verse was used by Nisa’s husband who insisted on practising polygyny. According to Nisa (aged 37), her husband argued that if she did not permit him to take another wife then she would be rejecting this verse as a command of God. Nisa felt disturbed by her husband’s statement: she feared being labeled a
disbeliever but at the same time she could not agree to her husband taking another wife.

Many people also quoted the verse about polygyny incompletely, only including the italicised phrase. This is because the men want to justify the act using an unassailable religious text. The verse on polygyny should be read completely, like any other verse in the Qur’an. By reading comprehensively, it can be understood correctly, including the conditions under which polygyny is permissible. The main requirement for polygyny is for men to practice justice, which, according to Wadud (1999; 2006), is almost unachievable. For many progressive scholars, instead of seeing this verse as giving men permission to practise polygyny, this verse is about limiting marriage to one wife only.64

Most of the women were also familiar with Islamic teachings about menstruation. During their period, women are exempt from religious worship such as praying (shalat) and fasting (puasa). In addition, during a woman’s period, it is forbidden to have intercourse. This is stated in Q. 2: 222:

They ask thee concerning women’s courses. Say: They are a hurt and pollution: so keep away from women in their courses, and do not approach them until they are clean. But when they have purified themselves, ye may approach them in any manner, time, or place ordained for you by Allah. For Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean. (Q. 2:222)

In fact the text only prohibits intercourse, not sexual intimacy. There are several Hadith that reported that the Prophet used to be intimate (but not to have intercourse) with his wife Aisyah while she was menstruating. I make this point in order to discard the opinion that a woman’s body is polluting (or polluted) during menstruation. The pollution only refers to the discharged menstrual blood not to a woman’s body.

64Detailed discussion of polygyny is provided in the section of marriage and sexuality in Islam in Chapter Two.
Several women understood the menstrual period as their free time, during which they were excused from having sex without feeling guilty. Many husbands understood as well that during this period they could not have sex with their wives. However, several others could not wait until their wives had finished their period.

Another text that regulates sexual relations in Islam that was quoted by my respondents is Q. 2: 223 on how to approach the wife. Sometimes, this verse is misunderstood to justify husbands’ authority to decide when and how they wish to have sex.

Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when and how ye will; but do some good act for your souls before hand; and fear Allah. And know that ye are to meet Him (in the Hereafter), and give (these) good tidings to those who believe. (Q. 2: 223)

Leli (aged 29), cited this verse in relation to her feeling that her husband is uninterested in sex and rarely asked for intercourse. She shared what she knew about this verse with her husband: that it is encouraged for the husband to ask for sex with his wife without hesitation. Leli said that she is ready to serve her husband sexually whenever he wants to. In the meantime, her husband is very considerate when asking for sex, fearing that she is tired after taking care of their son all day.

This verse also relates to the etiquette of intercourse and sexual positions based on the asbab al-nuzul (the specific socio-historical context following the revelation) of this verse. According to this verse the husband is permitted to have intercourse with his wife in a variety of positions as long as it is vaginal (not anal) sex. One Hadith related to the discussion is reported on the authority of Zuhri: "If he likes he may (have intercourse) from behind or while facing her, but it should be through the vagina." (Muslim, 1955, Book 008, no. 3365).65

65The English translation of Shahih Muslim by Abdul Hamid Siddiqui.
Mia explained that she learned about this verse at the pesantren, saying that those engaging in anal sex will not be protected by God in the afterlife. She mentioned that at that time she could not imagine what anal sex was.

Another Islamic teaching that was mentioned by my participants is about zina. One of my respondents, Ai (aged 18), fell pregnant before marriage. During the interview she said that she knew that pre-marital sex is prohibited in Islam, it is called zina (fornication; adultery). Although she did not know exactly the text related to the prohibition, I provided the text for her. It is stated in Q. 17: 32; 24: 2–3 about prohibition on pre-marital sex and the punishment for the doer. Ai said:

When that happened (premarital sex), it was an evil temptation. I could not resist it. I was heartbroken (sakit hati) afterward and regretted what I had done. But, what could I do, it had already happened and I had to accept the risk of possible pregnancy. My boyfriend said that I should not worry about that because he would marry me and be responsible if I got pregnant. I believed him, and we were married a year later, after I delivered my baby.

Another Qur’anic verse related to the marital sexual relationship is Q. 2: 187. It provides permission to engage in sexual activity on the nights of the fasting month (Ramadan) and the metaphor of wife-husband sexual relationships promoted in the Qur’an. This verse shows that the marital sexual relationship is a mutual relationship allowing both partners the right to gain mutual satisfaction. The metaphor used in this verse is that sexual activity between husband and wife is like a garment that covers each of their bodies (cf. Munir, 2002). This implies mutuality in the relationship and recognition that both sexes have desires to be fulfilled.

Permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garments and ye are their garments. Allah knoweth what ye used to do secretly among yourselves; but He turned to you and forgave you; so now associate with them, and seek what Allah hath ordained for you (Q. 2: 187, my emphasis).

Unfortunately, rarely did the women mention this verse as guidance in their sexual relations. This verse is unfamiliar compared to the Hadith about serving a husband’s sexual need or the verse about men’s authority. Only once was this
verse cited, during a FGD, without further elaboration on the meaning of the verse. In fact, this verse can be used to counter the teachings that suggest sex in marriage is the husband’s right and the wife’s duty, which mostly derive from the Hadith or ulama’s commentary. On the contrary, this verse declares that both wife and husband have the right to sexual fulfillment and satisfaction.

Hadith

The women mentioned several of the teachings related to marriage and sexuality derived from Hadith. One of the most cited teachings suggests that marital sex is the wife’s duty and husband’s right and that she cannot refuse his demands:

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "If a man invites his wife to sleep with him and she refuses to come to him, then the angels send their curses on her till morning." (Bukhari, 1971, v. 7, book 62, no. 121).66

This text was well-known among women I interviewed. When describing their sexual relations, many women said that they should comply with their husband’s request for sex and if they refused, their refusal is associated with sin (dosa), being cursed (dilaknat) and taboo (pamali). Several women could cite the content of the Hadith and were familiar with it as they knew it from pengajian or pesantren. Other women had only caught the message that Islam forbids it. A few others who did not engage in religious study acquired this advice about pamali from local cultural norms passed on by their mothers or their elders, or it was already widely believed among people.

The content of this Hadith is familiar not only among women but also among men. Several husbands used the Hadith to justify their sexual demands, and one even forced sex on his wife using the Hadith. Uum stated:

Once I refused to have sex with my husband because I was fed up with his bad behavior. I felt no sexual desire. My husband got angry and he poked my leg with a cigarette, burning it, and he beat me, and said, ‘This pain (pointing to my wounds) is nothing compared to what you will get in the

66 I use the English translation of Shahih Bukhari by M. Muhsin Khan.
afterlife: the curse of an angel.’ I stayed silent. I know that it is my duty to serve my husband and if I do not I am committing a sin.

However, Uum realised that her husband’s violent behaviour was making her sick and she decided that enough was enough. She argued that a husband’s power has limits, including in sex, especially when he had been violent and abandoned her.

In regard to Uum’s experience of violence from her husband during intercourse, she actually could counter her husband’s acts by referring to other texts (Hadith) mentioning that the Prophet banned the husband from being violent towards his wife but at the same time having intercourse with her: Narrated Abdullah bin Zam’a: The Prophet said, "None of you should flog his wife as he flogs a slave and then have sexual intercourse with her in the last part of the day." (Bukhari, 1971, vol. 7, Book 62, Hadith no. 132). Unfortunately, this Hadith is unfamiliar or unknown to most women. Though the flogging of a slave is not acceptable either, this Hadith shows us that the Prophet did not encourage husbands to be violent towards their wives.

There are several Hadith mentioned by my respondents which suggest positive attitudes towards marriage and sexuality. The Hadith that support women’s sexual expression and satisfaction in their marriage relationships were mentioned by several women I interviewed:

First, mukaddimah or mula’abah– the importance of foreplay

Imam al-Daylami records a narration on the authority of Anas ibn Malik that the Messenger of Allah is reported to have said: “One of you should not fulfill one’s (sexual) need from one’s wife like an animal, rather there should be a messenger between you.” “And what is that messenger?” they asked, and he replied: “kisses and (sweet) words.” (Daylami, vol. 2, Hadith no. 55)

Many women said that they would like their husbands to do foreplay before intercourse, but this was not accommodated by several husbands. The respondents complained that while it is easy to arouse a husband’s sexual desire, they (the
wives) require time to be sexually aroused, and foreplay would help them to increase their sexual desire.

Second, a wife has the right to experience pleasurable sex. In one Hadith it is reported:

Narrated by Annas bin malik, the Prophet said: “If any of you have sex with his wife let him be true to her. If he attains his pleasure before her then he shouldn't hurry her away until she also attains her pleasure.” (Abi Ya’la, VII, p. 208-209)

Only Tia mentioned this Hadith in the interview. She told her husband that in sexual relations he should not be focused only on his own pleasure but he should wait until she too experienced pleasure, and her husband agreed.

Third, a wife’s invitation to sexual activity is rewarded (pahala). This is derived from an Islamic prescription suggesting that sexual activity is not only physical but also gains God’s blessing because it is considered as ibadah (part of worship).

One report attributed to the Prophet said: “Even in your sexual organs there (can) be (reward for) charity.” (The companions) asked: “O Prophet, does a person who fulfills his sexual desires earn spiritual rewards?” The Prophet answered: “What if (meeting the need of) the sexual organs is done in a forbidden (haram) way, does he not incur a sin?” “Yes,” they replied. “Likewise then, if (a person meets his sexual needs) in a lawful (halal) way, he gains a blessing.” (Muslim, 1955, Vol. II, Hadith no. 1674, p. 329).

Only one woman, Halimah, would openly offer and initiate sex with her husband. She believed that she would gain rewards by initiating sex with her husband, just like other women believed that serving their husband sexually would gain them reward in the afterlife. Many other women were hesitant about initiating sex. They feared various repercussions if they did: Sandra thought it would irritate her husband because it would be as though she were taking control; Hera and Ina feared being teased by their husbands; Leli feared being rejected; and Nisa and Leli feared being labeled as too hungry for sex.

Nevertheless, the reason most often given by my respondents for not initiating
sex with their husbands was that they were shy (malu). Malu is an important learnt behaviour in Indonesian society that shapes daily interaction.

Many women have strategies for when they want to have sex but are embarrassed to say so openly to their husbands. They use indirect invitations such as they beautify themselves, or use perfume, or give a massage. The husbands notice these signs and happily acquiesce. One woman, Nida (aged 25), said “My husband almost never refuses to take part.”

These three religious texts ascertain and acknowledge that women also have sexual desires that need to be fulfilled and to experience sexual pleasure and satisfaction. Unfortunately, these texts are unfamiliar to women and men and Muslim society in general.

Islamic texts could often be used to justify two points of view, and sometimes are contradictory in their advice concerning gender relations in marriage. From the above description of Islamic texts on marriage and sexuality, there are some texts that support women’s desire, while several others seem to repress their desire. Unfortunately, the repressive texts dominate the other texts. It is the task of Muslim scholars to propose alternative insights in presenting and interpreting texts related to marriage and sexuality. Alternative reading of these texts is discussed below from the Muslim feminist theology perspective.

**Rereading Islamic Texts on Marriage and Sexuality**

By Islamic texts, as I noted above, I am referring not to a single text but to various texts of Islamic sources. These texts I categorised into three, namely: the primary text, the Qur’an; the secondary text is the sunnah: the Prophet’s praxis including his sayings, actions and approval of certain deeds that he knew about which are recorded in the Hadith; and tertiary texts, which are texts other than the above mentioned – they could be the sayings of the first generation ulama or of contemporary ulama, or simply the opinions of the kyai or ustadz.
Considering the many facets of texts in Islam, this chapter employs the hermeneutical reading of Islamic texts offered by Islamic feminists in analysing Islamic texts on marriage and sexuality. This hermeneutical reading emerged from the fact that Islamic texts have been abused in Muslim communities to oppress people, especially women. Islamic feminists offer a liberatory and egalitarian reading of the texts through their anti-patriarchal reading of the Qur’an (Barlas, 2002) and the sexist biases of Arabic language (Wadud, 2006).

In analysing the texts related to marriage and sexuality in Islam, most of which seem to position women as subordinate to men, Muslim scholars suggest to also link this analysis to state power and politics. Many cases, as recorded in Islamic history, show the strong engagement of texts and knowledge production/construction in aiming to sustain the state’s power or to privilege certain groups: rich over poor, majority over minority and men over women. Ilkkarachan (2000, p. 13) concluded that “the sexual oppression of Muslim women is not the result of the ‘Islamic’ vision of sexuality, but a combination of political, social and economic inequalities throughout the ages.” Unfortunately, religion is often misused as a powerful instrument of control by regimes that “instrumentalize” religion to strengthen their legitimacy (Arkoun, 2006, p. 33).

A person who is in a position of power exercises control over the production of knowledge: which texts should be learned and which ones should be hidden; which text sustains interest and which does not. In Arkoun’s (2006, p. 31) words, a person in power can decide which text is “thinkable” and which is “unthinkable”. According to Arkoun (2006), women are the main victims of the oppressive regime that has (mis)used religious texts that not only sustain women’s subordination, but also repress, control and criminalise women’s sexuality under religious codes.

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67 This hermeneutical reading is particularly proposed by Amina Wadud (1999, 2006) and Asma Barlas (2002). Both of them offer a comprehensive methodology for reading the Qur’an hermeneutically. Detailed discussion on the hermeneutical approach is provided in Chapter Three.
Islamic feminists aim to return to the Islamic principles derived from the Qur’an as the primary source. They argue that much inequality and discrimination in the name of Islam derives not from the Qur’an but from secondary and tertiary texts (Barlas, 2002; Abou El Fadl, 2001a).

It is important to differentiate the authoritative texts in Islam. Most Islamic feminists focus on the primary source of Islam that is the Qur’an, as the most authoritative text against which other texts cannot stand. Islamic feminists argue that the Qur’an in particular promotes the equality of human beings. They first explain the ontological state of being human, which is created from a single self that has the same quality either before God or before other humans (Q. 4: 1).

The confusion between the primary text and other texts is not a new phenomenon in Islamic societies. Arkoun (1994) indicates that the primary text has been marginalised over secondary and even tertiary sources since the early days of Islam. The primary source became tertiary and the tertiary texts became the primary reference points of Muslims’ attitudes.

Indonesia is no exception to this misunderstanding of Islamic texts. In Indonesia, the sayings of the ulama or ustadz often become the primary authority and people are unfamiliar with messages derived from the Qur’an. There is a tendency in Indonesia to formalise the Qur’an as a mere Arabic text that needs to be read and memorised to gain prestigious achievement without given attention to its translation or meaning. From an early age, children are forced to memorise certain surah in the Qur’an. They are praised for how many surah they have already memorised and parents invest in this expectation. However, it would seem to be better to emphasise meaning and understanding rather than merely memorising.

Rarely did my respondents refer to the Qur’an in their explanation of marriage and sexuality in Islam. More commonly they referred to the Hadith and ulama’s opinions. Unfortunately, the teachings derived from these texts are those that do not support women’s equality. For example, the Hadith cited by my respondents
about serving a husband’s sexual needs or being cursed by an angel is teaching that not only degrade women’s position but also oppose the teachings of the Qur’an. In verses Q. 4: 1 and Q. 9: 71-72 the Qur’an statues that woman is a full human agent on earth (khalifah) and has equal responsibility and capability with men Q. 9: 71-72.

In relation to the Hadith about bringing down the curse of an angel, Abdul Kodir (2012), a gender activist from a pesantren, proposes a reciprocal reading. Reciprocal reading of the text suggests that one text is always in relation to other texts and one should always rely on the universal Islamic principle of mutuality and so not disgrace one party. Reading this Hadith reciprocally enables us to use three approaches, as he suggested:

*First*, the linguistic approach: by paying attention to the literal meaning of the word used in the narration. The word *da’a*, used in the Hadith, in Arabic usually means to invite someone politely and with good manners. *Aabat* (lit. refuse) means to refuse someone impolitely (Abdul Kodir, 2012, p. 43). And the word *la’ana* (lit. curse) should be interpreted metaphorically given the fact that Angels are the creation of God – they have no desire and therefore would always be obedient. Thus, it seems quite contradictory that an angel would curse. Taken metaphorically, this passage means that refusal to have sex would cause a state of unease between the spouses. Using this approach the Hadith is suggesting that if a husband invites his wife to have sex politely or in a nice way but the wife rejects him impolitely, this would make their relationship uncomfortable for the whole night (Mas’udi, 2000, p. 126).

*Second*, by using the principle of Islamic jurisprudence (*ushul fiqh*) and applying the principle of dilalah al-dilalah (the meaning of meaning) or mafhum mukhalafah (contrary understanding; divergent meaning) one can conclude that there is a consequence of the act: if a wife invited her husband to have sex and he refused her, there would be religious consequences (Abdul Kodir, 2012). There is a
reciprocal need for sex in marriage between wife and husband so they should cooperate with one another and fulfill their desires mutually.

Third, the Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) approach: It is a fact that fiqh has strengthened the norm of sex as the wife’s duty and the husband’s right (Abdul Kodir, 2007; 2012). In fact, if we look deep down to analyse the fiqh, there is room for negotiation of women’s position in sexual relations. Referring to the Hadith above, some jurists suggest that the wife is permitted to refuse her husband’s sexual invitation with valid reasons, such as the husband’s violence (Zuhayli, 1985).

In fiqh concerning marital sexual relations, Zuhayli (1985, p. 106 – 107) mentions four famous jurists, most of whom (jumhur ulama)68 declared that sex in marriage is the husband’s obligation toward his wife, a sign of love and affection, because both spouses have the right to sexual fulfillment in marriage.

In relation to jurist opinions that support the wife’s right to sexual fulfillment is the Hadith concerning azl (coitus interruptus) which most jurists (jumhur ulama, except Syafi’i) agree should only be done by the husband after he gets permission from the wife. Acquiring permission from the wife indicates that she has the right to sexual pleasure and the act of azl may interrupt her sexual satisfaction.

From the compilation of Abu Dawud, it was narrated from Abu Huraira that Umar bin Khattab said: “The Messenger of Allah forbade practicing azl (coitus interruptus) with a free woman except with her consent.” (Dawud, n.d., Book 9, Hadith no. 2003)

Syafi’i jurists hold the opinion that sex in marriage is the husband’s right. Thus, the husband can practise azl whenever he wants and without the wife’s permission because she is not entitled to sexual fulfillment. Unfortunately, most

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68Jumhur ulama refers to the agreement of majority opinion of ulama concerning certain cases which can be used as the basis for Muslims to follow. There are four law schools in Islam, thus jumhur ulama usually happens when three of the jurists have the same opinion and only one opposes, as in the above case, where the Syafi’i jurist dissented.
Indonesian Muslims hold to the Syafi’I school of *fiqh* and their views on this matter dominate.

In relation to the verse on guardianship (Q. 4: 34):

> Men are the protectors and maintainers of women (*qawwam*), because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means

progressive scholars argue that male guardianship is not absolute and is adjustable. Wadud (1999), alongside Al-Hibri (1982), argues that the men’s *qawwam* toward women can only occur if two conditions are met as stated in the verse above: namely, that men have more means or more prominence than women and second, men spend their wealth to support women. If men fail to satisfy both conditions, they are not *qawwam* over women. Arguably, according to Aboe El Fadl (2001a), if a woman is the one providing financial support for the family, she is the one who is in the state of guardianship. Otherwise, if both of the spouses contribute to the family income, they share guardianship. It is flexible so long as the conditions stipulated in the verse are met by both partners.

One important aspect worthy of attention is that the Qur’an does not use the word obedience or promote obedience of the wife toward the husband. Many of the teachings related to women’s subjugation in married life derive from secondary or tertiary sources like the Hadith and the opinions of *ulama*. The Qur’anic teachings about marital relationships promote a relationship of mutual love and satisfaction for both partners as indicated in the verses Q. 30: 21; Q. 2: 187; Q. 4: 19).

> And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility (*sakinah*) with them, and He has put love (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*) between your (hearts): verily, in that are signs for those who reflect. (Q. 30:21)

Permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. *They are your garments and ye are their garments.* Allah knoweth what ye used to do secretly among yourselves; but He turned to you and forgave you; so now associate with them, and seek what Allah hath ordained for you. (Q. 2: 187)
O ye who believe! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may take away part of the dower [bride price] ye have given them – except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. (Q. 4: 19, my emphasis)

These verses signify that the marital/sexual relationship should be built upon mutual love, respect, harmony and fulfillment and indicate that both men and women have sexual desires that need to be fulfilled. By recognizing marital sex based on mutuality, the Qur’an suggests that sex aims not only for procreation but also for pleasure (Barlas, 2002).

Annemarie Schimmel said that this verse (Q. 2: 178) is “the ideal gender relation” in Islam. She further explained the meaning of garment in reference to the ancient religious ideas as “the alter ego of human being” (Schimmel, 1992, p. ix, my emphasis):

The garment can serve as a substitute for the person, and with a new garment one gains as it were a new personality. Furthermore, it hides the body, hinders the looking at the private parts, protects the wearer. According to this interpretation, husband and wife are so to speak each other’s alter ego, and each of them protects the partner’s honor. This seems to show how well the yang-yin principle works in marital relationships: husband and wife are equal in their perfect togetherness.

Barlas (2002) also argues that the Qur’an does not prescribe a particular sexual identity that privileges only one sex. The Qur’an does not mention female sexuality as insatiable or passive. On the contrary, Qur’an advises chastity for both sexes and suggests that sexual praxis should follow the moral limit prescribed in the Qur’an (Q. 24: 30–31). By applying the hermeneutical method, Barlas (2002, p. 25) arrived at the conclusion that the Qur’an is an egalitarian text that established the principle of equality of the sexes.

It is, then, important to provide both sides of the interpretation of texts: those that support women and those that seem to repress them, in order to provide women with balanced knowledge, understanding and guidance related to marriage and sexuality. The fact that some texts are more popular than others indicates that there are power structures that enable control of the circulation and
dissemination of texts such that patriarchal norms of marriage and sexuality are sustained.

**Learning from SAPA: Reproductive and Sexuality Rights among Rural Muslim Women in Eastern Bandung**

SAPA\(^{69}\) Institut is a non government organisation (NGO) established in 2005 from a small university circle discussion that focused on women’s issues. It is located in a rural area of Eastern Bandung and aims at empowering the community particularly with regard to three issues: reproductive and sexual rights, domestic violence and economic empowerment.

According to its founder and director,\(^{70}\) the recruitment methods employed by SAPA to attract community participation were: firstly, approaching community leaders and cadres; secondly, visiting houses and engaging in conversation to address the problems faced by women in that community; and thirdly, active participation in *majlis ta’lim* to deliver messages about gender equality from an Islamic perspective.

Based on the issues identified in conversations, the director said that the main issues faced by women in the village were domestic violence, trafficking, maternal mortality, difficulty in accessing business capital, and lack of participation in village organisations. To discuss these issues further, SAPA then established what it called Bale Istri (Women’s Shed), with regular fortnightly meetings. The number of women who participated in this meeting grew significantly, and came to include women from neighbouring villages. There are now eight villages participating in Bale Istri.

According to the director of SAPA, Islam is the basis for this empowerment because Islam has an important meaning in community life; identifying Islam as the basis avoids the problem of the activists being accused of promoting a

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\(^{69}\) SAPA in Indonesian means greet.

\(^{70}\) Interviewed with the director of SAPA Institut on July 11, 2012.
Western (feminist) agenda. She further said that discussions include understanding the meaning of Qur’anic verses and Hadith related to women’s issues.

Nowadays, women can negotiate and claim their right to refuse sex under certain conditions, such as when they are unwell or forced, and this is supported by Islam. The NGO also enabled intense communications with the husbands in relation to unwanted sex. The meetings in the Bale Istri concerning reproductive and sexual health have resulted in women becoming more aware of their rights and developing the capacity to bargain with their husbands.

This NGO attracts community participation because they not only provide information about women’s issues but also skills, training and assistance to members who are in need of help related to domestic violence, reproductive problems and economic empowerment. Thus, women in these communities are now more ready to challenge discrimination against them and have the ability to resist. Many young women in these villages have begun to delay marriage until they reach 20 years of age, and among those who already married, delay pregnancy until they reach 20 years of age.

SAPA also established Bale Laki-laki (Men’s Shed) to increase men’s awareness of women’s issues. Although at first it gained scant attention, nowadays, more and more men participate and are concerned about women’s issues. One of the director’s strategies in Bale Laki-laki was to have participants map the daily division of housework between the wife and husband. Many husbands suddenly realised how their wives were overloaded with housework. In addition, the husbands also realised how this heavy burden affected their wives’ health, with consequences such as miscarriages, difficult pregnancies and even maternal death. They are now willing to share the housework.

SAPA became even more significant through its active participation in drafting local legislation on the health of mothers, babies and toddlers called Perda KIBLA (Peraturan Daerah Kesehatan Ibu, Bayi dan Balita) 2008 in Bandung district. SAPA
also monitored its application in the community through establishing community-based monitoring. SAPA has made a significant contribution to empowering a rural community, particularly in relation to the reproductive and sexual health of women.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the link between Islamic texts and women’s experience of sex within marriage. The women used these Islamic teachings as guides, and it was clear that the teachings played an important role in shaping their sexual lives because they were considered sacred. Teaching on marriage and sexual relationships from Islamic texts is often contradictory. Unfortunately, the misogynist texts seem more popular than the texts that promote egalitarian relationships. Pesantren and majlis ta’lim are places that sustain the normative gender ideology in Indonesia through disseminating religious teachings. Many teachings emphasise the wife’s obedience in marital relationships and thus maintain the patriarchal system through the process of knowledge construction. Women internalised these religiously sanctioned prescriptions and the prescriptions influenced their daily interaction with their husbands. Many women were not aware of the source of the teachings, because the knowledge was mostly transferred through oral means. Women referred to these teachings as Islamic, whether they were taken from the Qur’an, or Hadith, or were simply the opinions of kyai/ustadz, and just accepted the authority of these sayings. Rarely was there discussion time to elaborate the teaching further or criticise it.

Within this situation, however, there are increasing numbers of ulama and activists who adopt a pro-female interpretation of Islamic texts, as explained above. At the level of the community, the SAPA Institute is a good example of the promotion of women’s sexual and reproductive rights from an Islamic perspective through majlis ta’lim by providing a non-gender biased interpretation.
Critical examination of the texts using an Islamic feminist hermeneutic approach is important in order to open the discourse to equity and social justice. The hermeneutic approach interrogates the domination of knowledge construction and distribution by certain authoritative religious powers and enhances the opportunities for other voices to contribute to knowledge construction and create new meaning. These critical methods address the use and abuse of Islamic teachings (cf. Azra, 2005) for the purpose of preserving a status quo, and aim to end discrimination that occurs in the name of Islam. They have the potential to transform Islamic social relations and practice.
Chapter Ten
Conclusion

Thesis Summary

Throughout the chapters in this thesis I have argued that sexual perceptions and behaviours among Muslim married women in West Java are influenced in various ways by religious (Islamic) teachings. Cultural norms also influence their perceptions and behaviours. Religious teaching refers to Islamic texts related to marriage and sexuality derived from various Islamic sources: the Qur’an, the Hadith, the opinions of the Prophet’s companions (sahabat) and their predecessors (tabi’in and tabi’it tabi’in), and the opinions of Muslim scholars (ulama). Cultural norms refer to cultural values related to marriage and sexuality in West Java in particular and in Indonesia in general. After Islam arrived in Indonesia, its teachings mingled with Indonesian cultures such that many Islamic teachings and cultural values became blended and, for many, no longer differentiable. Accordingly, in this thesis, Islamic teachings and cultural norms are inseparable but may be distinguishable. The distinction between Islamic teachings and cultural norms in this thesis is based on the interviews where women themselves differentiate between the two.

This thesis has demonstrated that religious teachings play a significant role in guiding women’s perceptions and behaviour in everyday marital relationships, as explained in Chapter 4. The women acquired these teachings from various sources such as Islamic books on marriage, sex manuals, kitab (classical Islamic textbooks), pengajian (religious gatherings) and peer conversations. These sources inform women about ideal marital and sexual relationships. Several women who did not have access to those books or did not have the opportunity to attend pengajian relied on their observations of the behaviour of their parents for their understanding of marriage. Some only said that they learned through experience. Generally, women know very little about sexuality. The normative
gender ideology prescribes that women be sexually passive in marriage and obedient to their husbands.

The only program organised by the KUA (Office of Religious Affairs), called a 'pre-marital information session', is seen by many as ineffective because it only gives general information related to married life in accordance with the normative gender ideology. This program has the potential to be important in providing knowledge to couples prior to marriage if properly implemented, and more could be done, e.g. to collaborate with other departments such as the Ministry of Health (Kementrian Kesehatan) and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (Kementrian Hukum dan Ham) to inform prospective married couples about reproductive and legal aspects of marriage.

Since marriage in Indonesia is a social and religious norm – as part of ibadah - women look forward to this achievement. The women felt happy preparing for their marriage but at the same time felt anxious. As explained in Chapter 5, finding the right person to be one’s jodoh (soul-mate) is complicated. Apart from physical attraction, wealth and good character, the women look for religious knowledge in a prospective partner. However, in many cases, women accepted a candidate without him matching their ideal. In reality the criteria were not much help. Age, and parental and social pressure to marry forced women to accept the first available candidate who proposed. Equally important though, some of the women were able to choose and decide which partner they wanted to marry. With the growing tendency toward self-choice and romantic love, some couples could manage a more ‘democratic relationship’ (Giddens, 1992) than before. During the courtship period, it is expected that women should maintain their chastity and not engage in premarital sex. Many women were aware of the danger of zina (illicit sex) and managed to stay away from it. In reality, women sometimes could not avoid their boyfriend’s pressure to engage in pre-marital sex.
Several women knew their husbands for only a short time prior to marriage. Several others knew them for quite a long time as a friend before they married. A consequence of a short period of courtship is often difficulty in adjustment to marriage, especially in the first years. In Chapter 6, five differences were identified as factors associated with this difficulty, even for those who knew their husbands for quite a long time, namely: family origin and upbringing, cultural background, age and class gap, and personal character.

These factors also influenced the management of the household. All the men and women in this study believe that housework and child rearing are a woman’s responsibility, while earning the household income is a man’s job. Because of this division of labour, rarely do husbands help with the housework. Even in the cases of unemployed husbands and/or working wives, the husband does not share the housework. Only a few women managed to negotiate distribution of housework with the husband. Intense communication and understanding between the partners in regard to household arrangements is needed to avoid tension and conflict in marriage.

Many researchers have documented changes in marriage patterns in Indonesia in the second half of the twentieth century (Jones, Hull, & Mohamad, 2011). Women increasingly choose to marry at a later age, to make their own decisions about their marriage partner, to engage in romantic relationships and even to remain single. However, it is still predominantly husbands who have more authority in marriage. Marital relationships in Indonesia are still characterised by a hierarchical relationship between wife and husband, which is supported by the state through the Indonesian Marriage Law of 1974 and religious prescription (particularly Q. 4: 34), both of which are strongly adhered to by Indonesians. Many husbands of the female participants in my study showed their authority over their wives in matters such as prohibiting them to work, preventing them from using contraception, and forcing them to engage in sex.
The hierarchical nature of marital relationships extends to the sexual relationships between wife and husband. From the descriptions of women’s experiences of marital sexual relations in Chapter 7, we can see that in most cases husbands still control wives’ sexuality: when to have sex and how to do it. The man is still the one who expresses his love for the woman, the man is still the one who asks for a date, and the man is still the one who initiates sexual activity. Several women do initiate sex, but very rarely. This suggests that there will always be exceptional practices among couples; however, the general norm is as stated above.

Many scholars who have done research on sex and sexuality in Indonesia (Jennaway, 2002a; Utomo, 2003; Bennett, 2005a; Wieringa, Blackwood, & Bhaiya, 2007; Parker, 2008) have argued that women’s sexuality is influenced by the normative gender ideology. This was also true for my female participants. The above-mentioned researchers focused on single women’s sexuality, arguing that the normative gender ideology requires single women in Indonesia to contain their sexual desire and guard their chastity and virginity. My thesis focuses on women’s sexual relationships in married life, but I found that they too are indoctrinated by the normative gender ideology of being a good wife and mother.

There are two main indicators of the sexual standard of the Muslim married woman in Indonesia, namely, submission and servitude. The ideology of women’s submissiveness and servitude in married life is strongly justified by religious prescription. The concept of istri yang ta’at (an obedient wife) lingers in women’s minds when they describe the ideal of the good wife. The concept of ta’at (obedience) is given prominence as the core guidance in married women’s relationships with their husbands. Marriage for women was also about serving their husband. Women, whether willing or not, were expected to be ready at any time to attend to their husband’s sexual needs. This prescription is strongly influenced by Islamic teaching where women are reluctant to refuse for fear of religious sanctions.
As the only sanctioned sexual relationship in Indonesia, marriage should be a place where women can express and explore sexual desires, which were repressed and forbidden when they were single. In reality, this is not easy to do, not only because they have already been trained not to express their sexuality but also because women find themselves subject to another strong norm concerning their sexuality in marriage: sex as duty. Most of my female participants described marital sexual relationships as their duty and their husband’s right. There is a significant on women when sex is seen as a duty instead of a right. In seeing sex as a right, the women would have the opportunity to discuss, negotiate and express their own sexual desire to achieve pleasurable sex. In contrast, if sex is a duty, women focus on their husband’s satisfaction and tend to ignore their own sexual satisfaction, which is considered unimportant compared to servicing their husband.

The experience of sexual initiation on the first night, when couples are expected to have their first sexual encounter, varied among women. Most women felt fear and anxiety. Lack of information about sex (how to do it) and negative assumptions, such as that women experience pain in their first sexual encounter, increased their anxiety. However, the women were familiar with the Islamic etiquette of intercourse prior to getting married. Included in the steps ordained prior to intercourse is mukaddimah (introduction), where it is recommended that the husband engages in foreplay before having sex. This foreplay is necessary in order that the wife can experience orgasm together with the husband, but many of the husbands ignored this step.

Included in the concept of submission and servitude is the expectation of a wife’s unconditional and eternal sexual availability. Because of this belief, women are reluctant to refuse their husbands sex whether they are willing or unwilling, enjoying it or not. Religious teachings strongly influence the understanding that refusing a husband’s need to have sex is associated with sin and being cursed, and is therefore pamali (taboo). Women create meaning for their own sacrifice as a
form of religious devotion and perceive their servitude as part of *ibadah* (worshiping God) that will gain them reward in the afterlife.

There are different attitudes towards sex in marriage between women and men. For several women, sex was not that important in marriage compared to other aspects such as children and fulfilling the everyday needs of the household. Only a few mentioned that it was an important aspect of married life. During interviews, women acknowledged that they had sexual desire. Women associated sexual desire with emotional intimacy and a close relationship with their husband, not necessarily requiring (or culminating in) sexual intercourse. Women’s experiences of sexual desire were varied and were influenced by many factors such as their financial situation, fatigue, their husband’s abusive behaviour, reproductive status (pregnancy, childbirth and menopause), their husband’s infidelity, and frequency of sexual activity. These factors variously caused women’s sexual desires to increase or decrease. For men, sex was important in marriage and could also be used in many cases as an excuse for divorce and the freedom to engage in another marriage. Men simply associated intimacy with the sex act.

Several women in this study experienced sexual abuse as part of domestic violence, in varying degrees from minor to severe. Unexpectedly I found that women who experienced domestic violence did not wish to get divorced and rather chose to stay in their abusive marriages. At the same time, they did not try to have discussions with their husband to stop or decrease his violent behaviour. They argued that life after divorce would not guarantee them better conditions. Those women who did eventually divorce after leaving their violent marriages noted changed attitudes: (1) self-awareness and transformed self-consciousness, such that a woman should empower herself in order that she can take responsibility for her own fate and avoid men’s objectification; (2) self-reliance, increasing their skills or seeking further education to improve their living standards and to achieve more; (3) self-reflexivity, to avoid making the same mistake by being careful in choosing a future marriage partner.
Religious texts provide two sets of teachings about sex in marriage for women, as a duty and as a right, as described in Chapter 9. One Hadith, unanimously popular among women, which emphasises sex in married life as a wife’s duty and a husband’s right, takes precedence over the Qur’anic message on mutual sexual satisfaction between wife and husband. The Qur’anic text suggests that sex in marriage is not the wife’s duty but should be mutually shared and mutually fulfilling. Presenting both texts and analysing their validity is important to give a balanced understanding of sexual guidance in Islam and to promote a positive attitude toward sex in married life by acknowledging women’s sexual desires. This attempt also intends to avoid hiding one text behind another or favouring certain texts that privilege one gender over another.

In many Muslim societies, including Indonesia, there has been a shift toward giving authority to the texts. Many individuals rely more heavily on certain religious scholars’ opinions than the actual text of the Qur’an as their primary source. Data showed that many women who acquired Islamic knowledge from pesantren or majlis ta’lim refer heavily to the opinion of its kyai or preachers and fail to acknowledge whether those opinions were taken from the Qur’an or Hadith or were simply the scholars’ opinions. This reflects the idea that the transmission of Islamic knowledge in Indonesia is an oral tradition. Accordingly, as this thesis has also revealed, pesantren and majlis ta’lim (religious study gatherings) contribute significantly to the dissemination of texts related to marriage and sexual relations for women. Thus, it is important to provide gender sensitivity training to mubaligh (male preachers) and mubalighah (female preachers) who preach in majlis ta’lim, as well as to leaders of pesantren (kyai). This effort has already been initiated by several NGO such as P3M, FK3 and Rahima who provide gender sensitivity training among students in pesantren, among the penghulu (marriage registrars) and among mubalighah. This program should be recognised for its work and needs further support from the government.
The Future of Marital Sexual Relationships: Breaking the Silence

Apart from the repression of sexual desire experienced by women in their marriages, agency is exercised by women in their everyday life as a survival strategy as explained in Chapter 8. In reality, women do have various strategies to excuse or exempt them from having sex with their husbands and a few women managed to discuss with their husbands their preferences so that sex could be pleasurable for them. Among diverse experiences, four women were notably able to exercise agency in this area. Heterosexual relationships are not always based on domination/subordination, but can also offer the recognition and fulfillment of women’s desires and pleasures. Women do discuss their sexual preferences and negotiate their experience of sexual pleasure with the husband, but reports of this are very rare. The strategies used by the women to avoid sex include falling asleep, caring for the children, sleeping in a child’s room, or wrapping themselves tightly around the bottom to prevent access to their lower body. However, the above mentioned belief that sex is a wife’s duty is strongly embedded in each woman’s mind, so they often felt guilty when avoiding sexual activity.

A few women suggested that while having sex with their husbands, they are aiming to achieve pleasurable sex themselves. Four women argued that the husband should not care only for his own satisfaction but also care for his wife’s. They told me that women also have sexual desire and deserve to experience pleasurable sex. The women’s ability to negotiate is a good sign of an open road toward mutual recognition and mutual satisfaction in marital sexual relationships. Although only a few women had this opinion, they are significant because they not only resist common beliefs concerning married women’s sexuality but also privately demand equal recognition in sexual relationships.

In being able to discuss matters with their husbands, women negotiate their sexual preferences and have a chance to build understanding and respect between them. Exercising agency, women have the capacity to resist inequality in
sexual relationships. This experience signals possibilities for changes in marital sexual relationships towards mutual recognition of desire and pleasure in marriage. The changes in sexual relations will not be possible unless men participate and support these changes. This is a good way to start building marital sexual relationships beyond domination, with two people relinquishing self-interest to form gender-equal sexual relations in marriage through “meaningful consent and mutuality” (Ali, 2005a, p. 151). This ideal marital and sexual relationship is supported by Qur’anic verses on marriage where God “created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts),”71 with an equal sexual relationship being described as “They [wives] are your garment and ye are their garments.”72 Thus, “live with them on a footing of kindness and equity.”73

During the interviews, women emphasised that they were more influenced by Islamic prescriptions on marriage and sexual relations than cultural values. Islam in Sunda is quite strong. The people of West Java are identified as being Sundanese as well as being Muslim (Newland, 2000; Kahmad, 2006). Although in some areas ritual ancestral practices are still performed, their significance has faded away in later generations. With the Islamic revival that has gained great momentum in contemporary Indonesia, Islam is now incorporated into many aspects of social life, e.g. the ubiquity of Islamic symbols and increasing public piety (Hefner, 1997; Fealy, 2008). This revival was also evident among my participants, many of whom wanted to be identified as guided more by Islam in their marital and sexual relationships than as preserving cultural values. The women believed that religious guidance has a higher authoritative effect than cultural norms, as it is considered sacred. The divine aspect of religious teaching leaves a deep psychological impact on women’s experience of their relationship: their obedience, hope and faith. Many associate sexual relations with ibadah for

71Q. 30: 21
72Q. 2: 187
73Q. 4: 19
which they will receive reward in the afterlife. Thus, although they experience unwanted and unpleasurable sex, they invest in it for their future happiness in the afterlife.

In fact, the divinity of Islamic text only applies to the Qur’anic texts as the verbatim revelation of God. Thus, Muslims should regard the Qur’an as the highest authoritative text in Islam. Texts other than the Qur’an, such as Hadith, should be critically analysed because although they are attributed to the Prophet, they were written three decades after His death. Special attention should be drawn to the possible fabrication of the Prophet’s sayings, the authenticity of the report in terms of the credibility of the person (sanad) who narrated the Hadith and its content (matan). Other ‘texts’ referred to during the interviews include the ulama’s opinion and/or their commentaries, in oral or written form. It is important to examine the personal and political interest behind the production and construction of the texts. In Muslim societies, including Indonesia, religious texts are frequently used to sustain power. It is because of this that the hermeneutical approach to Islamic texts finds its significance.

The hermeneutical approach to Islamic texts aims to analyse the text not merely through its grammatical structure, but equally with attention to the socio-historical context of the production of the texts. Another important aspect of the hermeneutical approach is the idea of intertextuality, which means that texts in Islam are interconnected. The text is not isolated. To grasp a comprehensive understanding of texts in Islam requires treating the texts as a whole. The Islamic feminist hermeneutical approach to Islamic texts critiques the patriarchal reading of texts that are used to justify men’s superiority over women.

It is important to provide a better understanding of women’s sexuality so that women know what happens to their bodies and what they should do when their body changes, for instance, when they begin menstruating. Positive attitudes toward women’s bodies are also significant in promoting women’s hygiene and health. This dissertation contributes to the body of knowledge on the religious
construction of female sexuality in Indonesia, with a particular emphasis on married women’s sexuality. It also contributes new knowledge on women’s understanding of their sexuality and their sexual practices.

I am grateful to the women who participated in this study. In my opinion they are strong and resilient in facing their marital hardships and apply their own strategies for survival in this patriarchal society. In this thesis, the women demonstrated that in resisting their unjust circumstances they were empowered to create a more stable life. It was hard and uncertain for them at first; the women needed courage to speak and act, and they needed support for their decision-making. However, in the end, these women felt good about speaking out, breaking the burden of silence that they had carried for so long.
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Appendices

A. In-depth Interview Sample Topics and Questions:

I. Demographic Questions:
   1. What is your year of birth?
   2. How do you describe yourself in term of race/ethnicity?
   3. What is your employment status? Can you describe the work you are doing?
   4. What about your husband, what is his employment status?
   5. Could you describe your parent’s job?
   6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   7. What is your current marital status?
   8. How many children do you have? What age are they?
   9. Would you please estimate your annual income?

II. Marriage History:
   1. How long have you been married?
   2. Is this your self-choice marriage or your parent’s arranged marriage?
   3. How long did you know your husband before getting married?
   4. Could you explain your wedding preparation?
   5. What about your wedding night, could you describe about it?
   6. What do you think about an ideal marriage? Do you have that in yours? Can you tell me more about that?
   7. What do you think the relationship between wife and husband should be? What do you do about that?

III. Sources of Information:
   1. Whom or what do you rely on for information concerning marriage and your marital relationship? For information about what aspects of marriage?
   2. Who or what are the most important sources to you? How important to you is each source? In what way is it important?
   3. When do you acknowledge this information? How did you feel/react about it? How do you think about it?

VI. Sexuality:
1. How have you found information concerning sexuality? (bodily change, periods, the biology of sex/reproduction, pregnancy, contraception)

2. Can you remember what you found out? Was this information about technical or biological facts, or was it psychological, or religious/moral?

3. In our culture, women are usually assumed to be passive and submissive to the husband. How do you feel about this? What do you do about this?

4. Do you ever talk to your husband about sex? When? About what aspects of sex? What does he say/how does he react?

5. Have you ever discussed sex with someone else: friends, family, or teacher? What do they say/how do they react about it?

V. Identification of Islamic Texts on Sexuality

1. Do you know some Islamic texts that teach about sexuality? What are they?

2. What do they teach?

3. How do you know about these teachings? – from whom?

4. When do you think you learnt about these teachings? (was it during your high school, university or recently)?

VI. Understanding of Islamic Texts on Sexuality

1. What do you think about those Islamic teachings on sexuality?

2. How do you understand this teaching on sexuality?

VII. The Implications of the teaching for women’s behaviour in their marital relationships

1. Which teaching influences you most?

2. What does it mean to you? What do you do about it?

3. In what ways does this teaching influence your behaviour in your relationship with your husband?

4. Could you give me an example?

5. Do you discuss it with your husband? – when? What is his reaction?

6. How about the cultural norm that restricts sex to the marital relationship, what do you think about it?

7. Do you know anyone who is having a sexual relationship outside marriage, e.g. an affair, or premarital sex? What do you think about it?

IV. Participation in KUA (Office of Religious Affairs) pre-marital Information Session

1. When you registered for your marriage, did the KUA officer ask you to participate in a pre-marital information session? What did you think of it?

2. How do you describe this session? What information did you get?

3. How effective was this information for you?
Questions for KUA (Office of Religious Affairs) Officers:
1. Could you describe your role in this office?
2. Could you explain what the pre-marital information session is?
3. How do you organise the session?
4. How many times do you provide a session for each couple?
5. What information do you provide?
6. Could you give me further detail on this?
7. How do you deliver the information to the participants?
8. What is the purpose of this service?
9. Do you also invite other experts like doctors, marriage consultants, lawyers, ustadz/ustadzah (preacher) to deliver the information? What information do they provide?
10. What is the response from the participants concerning this programme?

Questions for Kyai/Religious Authority
1. Could you describe your role in this pesantren?
2. How many students do you have? Where are they from?
3. What subjects does this pesantren teach to the students?
4. What kitab (traditional books) do you refer to as a reference for each subject?
5. What did you consider in choosing the material for your teaching?
6. What method do you use to teach these kitab (traditional book) to the students?
7. Is there any discussion involved in your teaching method? Could you give detailed information on this?
8. What kind of kitab do you choose to teach the students about sexuality in Islam? (for example, courtship, marriage, sexual intercourse, menstruation, pregnancy, women’s and men’s bodies, etc.)
9. What did you consider in choosing this kitab?
10. Could you explain the content of this kitab?
11. In relation to this topic, some pesantren use kitab Uqud al-Lujain (the regulation of wife-husband relationship by Nawawi al-Bantani). What do you think of this kitab?
12. What about the hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim concerning the curse of angel for the wife who refuse to have sexual intercourse with her husband? What do you say about that?

13. There seems more Islamic teaching that gives privilege to men’s sexual needs rather than women’s. What do you think about that?

B. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Sample Questions: (Identification and understanding of Islamic teaching of Sexuality)

I. Definition
1. If you’ve heard the word ‘sexuality’, what do you think of it? What is included in this term?
2. How often has sexuality been discussed in your life?
3. How do you think sexuality is being discussed (in Indonesia/society in general)?

II. Sources of Information
1. How have you found information concerning sexuality?
2. Can you remember what you found out? Was this information about technical or biological facts, was it psychological, or religious/moral?
3. Who or what are the most important sources of information on sexuality for you? How important to you is each source?
4. When did you acknowledge (first hear about?) this information? How did you feel/react about it? How did you think about it?
5. Have you ever discussed (your) sexuality with someone? (Husband, friends, family, or teacher)? What do they say/how do they react about it?
6. Do you think that we have adequate information concerning our sexuality?

III. Islam and sexuality
1. In your opinion, how does Islam discuss sexuality?
2. Do you know some Islamic texts that teach about sexuality? What are they?
3. What do they teach?
4. How do you know about these teachings? – from whom?
5. When do you think you learnt about these teachings? (was it during your high school, university or recently)?

IV. Understanding of Islamic teaching of sexuality
1. What do you think about those Islamic teachings on sexuality?
2. How do you understand this teaching?
3. What do you do about that?
4. How does this teaching affect woman’s perception and behaviour? In what way?
5. Can you give me an example?

V. Authority
1. In your opinion, what is the most important institution for disseminating Islamic knowledge of sexuality?
2. How do you find out the role of *ulama* in distributing the Islamic knowledge of sexuality?