

## Phenomenology Study of Low Class Prostitute: Dramaturgy Model “Poyok” in Pasar Raya Padang Padang-West Sumatra

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**Abstract:** This study describes the dramaturgy model performed by lower-class sex workers in Pasar Raya (Central Market) area in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia. Sex workers operating on the second floor of the Central Market dominated by divorcees. They led a double life as prostitute to make ends meet and family care-taker. This study was conducted using in-depth interviews with reference to Erving Goffman dramaturgical theory. The result of the study provides an overview of ‘on the stage (front stage)’ appearances as sex workers locally infamous as ‘Poyok’ the seductive appearance they keep to show professionalism. While ‘backstage’ they shift cover as responsible single parent to the children.

**Key words:** Dramaturgy, lower-class sex workers, poyok, Padang, dramaturgical theory, floor

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### INTRODUCTION

West Sumatra Province with Padang as its capital is located in the Western Region of Indonesia. It is widely known to be inhabited by devout Muslim community from long ago. It is reflected perfectly in its ultimate indigenous tenet; Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah/ABS-SBK (Tradition is rooted in the (Islamic) Law, the (Islamic) Law is originated from the Qurann. The tenet means traditions must uphold moral values based on Islamic Law which was stated in the Quran. Unfortunately, the people in the province has started to disregard the tenet due to modernization and external values influences.

One indication that shows the society has started to abandon the tenet is the emergence of free sex practices in West Sumatra, especially in Padang, casually by the general population especially, the youngsters and commercially by prostitution business. The local term for sex workers is Poyok.

Of many known sites where prostitution activities take place in the capital, the second floor area of Pasar Raya Padang has been publicly known to be swarmed by increasing number of sex workers. They do not operate openly for fear of the penance stipulated by the regional law. The law imposed by the Padang municipality threatens every woman voluntarily involved in prostitution to face severe legal sanctions. Kartini (2005) states that one kind of unidentified prostitution are those engaged in the darkness either individually or being organized. The operational strategy applied in Pasar Raya

is discreet but profitable. The sex workers in Pasar Raya dominated by divorcee aged 25-35 and considered to be low-class.

Supratiknya (1995) argues that in general the reason women become sex workers was to earn money to support their families. It is also the case for the women selling themselves on the second floor of Pasar Raya Padang. Articles published by the local newspaper have repeatedly confirm it. The women did not intend to earn millions but a mere tens of thousands rupiah (1 US\$ = 13 Bp.), just to cover the familie’s basic needs.

The dramaturgy began to be an option for the women to navigate their lives. The dramaturgy model requires a set of front stage and back stage they deliberately put in the show. According to Erving Goffman, social life can be divided into “front area” (front region) and “rear area” (back region). Front region refers to the persona an individual present in public to show that the persona has style and formal role in society. The front regions are playing the top role in a stage in front of an audience (Kuswarno, 2009).

This study aims to describe the form of dramaturgy in the communication experiences performed by low class sex workers in Pasar Raya Padang who led a double life as sex workers and divorced woman. In the front stage they should act as prostitute while at the back stage they would become a mother for the children.

**Literature review:** Observing the prostitution practices in Padang, particularly in Pasar Raya it is like seeing a life phenomenology emerging in urban communities.

Phenomenology literally means can be seen. It derives from Greek 'pheinomenon' which means that which appears and 'logos' which means study. Having that said, based on the origin, the word phenomenology means a study orienting to explain the seen reality.

The term was introduced by Johann Heinrich. Kuswarno mentioned that, phenomenology seek to understand how human constructs meaning and important concepts within the framework of inter subjectivity that is our understanding of the world shaped by our relationships with others (Kuswarno, 2009).

Alfred Schutz says that phenomenology is the way people understand other's consciousness but in the end people live in the stream of their own consciousness. Inter-subjective world is the life we face in daily basis (Ritzer and Goodman, 2008). In prostitution world, phenomenology describe its reality in ways people from outside can never fully understand. It has its own rule that cannot be equaled by rules commonly applied and that there are layers after layers. Sex workers see their place as a mere stage and that they live wearing many hats.

Dramaturgy studies the human behavior context in order to achieve their goals instead of scrutinizing the result of the conduct. Dramaturgy understands that human interaction imply that there is such an agreement of approved behavior that can be taken to fulfill the purpose of social interaction. Playing a role is one tool to sort of fulfilling the agreement (Macionis, 2000). The dramaturgical theory also explains that a man's identity is not stable and that identity is part of an independent psychestatus. Human identity can change depending on the interaction with other people. Dramaturgy in social interaction is similar with a theater performance. Man is the actor that seeks to combine the personal characteristics and achieving the purpose of social interaction through 'the act' he or she performs.

In achieving these goals, according to the dramaturgical theory, people will develop behaviors supporting the role. As in any drama, an actor must prepare the prop for the show. The props include settings, costumes, dialogues and other non-verbal action. This is aimed to leave good image on the audience and pave the way for achieving goals. Goffman calls the above actions as image management. Goffman also sees that, there is a big difference when the actor is acting on stage (front stage) and backstage (back stage) acting. The presence of an audience in the front stage and the awareness of the actor to be a part of a show are two conditions contributing to the big difference mentioned earlier. Acting in the front stage is when the person trying to play their role for the audience to understand the purpose of whatever behavior they have conducted (Duncan, 1984).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The trading of sexual services for money is simply asurvival method, arguing that each time the women get a customer, they will create an image to show that they are actually pretending to not serious about their career choice. They pretend to plan to be a prostitute temporarily due to absence of skill and only want the money to survive. The act must be played on a daily basis in order to pay the bills. Meanwhile, based on data from previous studies, the number of lower class sex workers poyok-continues to grow.

Based on Indonesian law, prostitution is not explicitly stipulated as illegal. However, as the trend in the region consider itself as religious in that case more conservative, the municipality of Padang threaten to impose locally enforced regulation on prostitution which includes jail time and other penal methods.

The method used in this research is qualitative with phenomenological approach. This research aims to identify and decrypt the subjective experience of lowclass sex workers. In phenomenological approach, each individual consciously experience an event. Operationally, the study was designed as a qualitative research based on the phenomenological research tradition. Qualitative research design was used based on the consideration that through qualitative research, researchers can reveal and understand how the research subjects construct meaning, social reality and communication behavior in their natural setting through their own eyes.

Phenomenological research tries to explain or reveal the meaning of the concept or phenomenon of experience that the individuals are aware of. This study was conducted in the subject's natural situation so there is no limitation in defining or understanding the phenomenon being studied. According to Creswell (1998), the phenomenological approach suspend all judgment about natural attitudes until a particular ground of the attitude found. The delay is usually called 'epoche' (period of time). Epoche concept is to distinguish the data area (subject) with the researcher's interpretation. The concept of epocheis the center where researchers compile and categorize initial assumptions about the informations provided by the subjects. Subject sampling was purposive technique, researchers chose three divorcees who earn a living by being sex workers on the second floor of Pasar Raya Padang.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Front stage as Poyok in Pasar Raya Padang:** Poyok's social interaction are mainly taken place at home and in Pasar Raya, consequently their verbal and non-verbal

communication activities conducted will identify in which setting the communication take place. The research results show that particular domain turns into their front and back stage.

All communication activities related with business are aimed to impress prospective clients. Poyok's front stage is Pasar Raya, communication activities with prospective clients comprise of their appearance, seduction and temptation to lure the customer. The women will select any men they consider are in need of their services. They have built an instinct to intuitively single out the most probable man to respond to their offer.

The sex workers interviewed in this study generally perform image management well. Verbal and nonverbal communication of the sex workers are distinctive compared to those who are not, the way they speak and the body language are seductive and exaggerated. According to the research informants UL, MT and YP, they present the other side of themselves in the front stage. When they are meeting the customer, they will switch their normal appearances to the so called sex worker's outlook which means they will change their cloth to be tighter and revealing and make-up to be heavier. According to FR, most of their customers are the traders in Pasar Raya.

UL said that in order to get a customer she would approach any man roaming the market seemingly alone. UL admitted that she was never embarrassed by what she did to survive. The 28 years old widow was divorced due to domestic violence. She told her family that she was working in a salon. She also told them that her sexy attire and heavy make-up are dress code in her work place. When she is in Pasar Raya, she would make herself easily spotted by any prospective customer by blending in the crowd, so that, it will be easy for them to approach her. For any man looking and to observant eyes, the women's attire and make-up give them a way as sex workers. UL uses to wear dark dresses and full make-up, she felt that she would look sexy and glowing that way. She would try her best to get at least one customer a day.

MT was no different. She went all out in terms of doing her make up. According to her, perfect make up is the ultimate tool to attract more customer and earn her money. Therefore, MT enticed prospective customers by her heavy makeup that make her unrecognizable to people who knew her outside of prostitution world. She completed her looks with accessories such as necklaces, earrings and strong smelled perfume. Her looks is her own idea in the hope to attract customers. MT was 30 years old and had two children. She decided to become sex worker safter she found out that her husband was having an affair with another woman. s previous women, YP also

put a lot of effort on her looks. She claimed to have a signature look. She wear a head scarf in her back stage on the front stage she would cover her own hair with wig. Most of her customers are goldsmiths. YP is recently divorced after 1 year of marriage. Her husband were alcoholic and YP had it enough. YP was taking care of her 1 year old baby.

UL, MT and YP made a lot of effort in their looks in the front stage aimed to achieve their goal, a lot of money. Most of them are uneducated and became a sex worker due to limited choice of jobs that offered a lot of money with no skills. Selling sex is easy and requires no special skills it just takes to be able to seduce and tempt many men to be interested in using their services.

#### **Typical forms of dramaturgy in Poyok's self-presentation in verbal and non-verbal messages:**

From the findings in the field on Goffman's dramaturgy forms in verbal and nonverbal communication among sex workers their self-presentation model was seen from the verbal and nonverbal communication dimensions of the front and back stage in the Goffman dramaturgy perspective. The models are specified because there are different communication symbols displayed. From the verbal communication dimensions, these low class sex workers are generally considered to be more expressive and showed were more able to read communication symbols from their customers.

In the nonverbal dimension, they generally do not keep their distance with the customers. They tend to actively touch the other person. For example, when meeting a customer, they will hold the customer's hands, touch the customer's cheek intentionally to build rapport despite of the fact that just met. This bold approach is their way to make the customers feel comfortable and to hook them.

On the front stage, verbal symbols also become important, especially, the limits in speaking. They can only speak in the local language or terms they express more freely. While in nonverbal dimensions they generally communicate in a quiet and gentle tone. The body language were fully employed when they were dealing with customers.

**Poyok's backstage The family:** The back stage for the low class sex workers is the role of a responsible mother. Ronald said that the image management through nonverbal communication language is how someone's image formed by the body language used. Nonverbal appearance proves that a person can change the look and character in extreme, the front stage to the back stage. according to YP, she would change from sex workers to a

good mother for her children when she was at home. She did her best to keep her job a secret. She would be more sensitive to her family needs. She would look completely different than her looks when she was luring men in Pasar Raya.

UL made an impression that she was an ordinary woman who worked in a salon. At home she would act as an innocent homemaker, so that, no family member or any relative is aware of her real job. She would dress modestly and wear almost no make-up. MT confirmed it is also her case, for her family when she dressed up it meant that she had an appointment with friends or other relatives.

When someone she finds out about what she did for a living, the sex workers are at risk of getting ridicules from society. Living as a sex workers and divorcee is the accumulated result of the conflicts experienced during the process of getting to know the world of prostitution, to actually being involved in the business. To that end, Poyok plays several roles in their lives, the role as an extraordinary sex partner on the front stage when dealing with customers on the back stage played as are sponsible mother. This process is a strategy for survival. As already described, Goffman, distinguishes the strategies used by individuals to gain social confidence on their self-concept. Individuals play a controlled role in front of others at the front stage and the individual' actual roles will allow her to behave freely for there was no audience.

Sex workers play the role of being the ideal female who has better skills insex to satisfy customers this role allows them to position themself as the cure of men's lust. The other role is a homemaker who takes of her children well.

There are many challenges faced by these women; ranging from working in an illegal industry, being caught in a raid and infected by sexually transmitted diseases. Goffman stated that, any individual or group must understand position in the front stage and in back stage. Front stage refers to a staged drama where the behavior of the players are always controlled, monitored and evaluated by two things; text and audience response. On the other hand, the back of the stage allow the player to be their true selves (Goffman, 1959).

On the front stage, the sex worker's behavior were monitored and evaluated by another individual in this case, the customers. Consequently, they will show the actions and behavior to uphold the image of a sex goddess. Everything the wear and do eventually give them away. They are very creative in ways they lure the customer and physical appearance in making sure they will be acknowledged. On the back stage, the women would behave naturally without having to calculate every single moves they take and this part of their life that they

are happiest. Goffman dramaturgical approach core view is that when people interact with each other they would like to manage the image created to be perceived by others. For the Poyok case, they perform a show to cover up their identity. In front of other people, the front stage is conjured up by playing a role impeccably to create an illusion of a good image arrested others.

They behave as a rogue and unscrupulous woman, although basically they do not like being and are uncomfortable. In addition to that they will put on revealing and sexy dressesre gardless of the views of others. As Goffmanhig hlighted, the laws of social interaction can be referred to actors who enact the lives of others in theater or drama performances.

Individuals or groups must enliven the roles on a stage before an audience. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes that individuals play their active role in presenting themselves as acting efforts are made to endure what life has in store for them. Goffman assumes that when people interact, they want to present an acceptable impression of one self to others. He called such efforts as image management, a technique used by actors to foster a certain image in act particular situations to achieve specific goals. When interacting or communicating, people will attempt to look better than they really are in the eyes of the counterpart. Therefore, everyone perform do show for each other. Goffman (1959) concludes that people are actors who structure their performances to make impressions on audiences.

By following this theatrical analogy, Goffman speaks about front stage as part of the show that generally work with certainty and generic to define something for the benefit of the people who are watching the show. At the front of stage, Goffman distinguishes the setting from personal fronts. Setting refers to the physical background needed to be present in order to create intended impression and upkeep the whole story.

Goffman also discusses about the back stage where fishy facts are hidden from the people who know the women well. The back stage is adjacent to the front stage, actually there is a shortcut between the two. The women totally do not expect members of the audience to appear on the back stage. They put enormous effort in making sure that never happen. The smooth running of the show relies heavily on the ability of preventing the audience from entering the back stage.

The results of the research shows the dramaturgy model attempted by the sex workers (Poyok) was for the money. Impression management staged through nonverbal messages is the impression formed by body language or gestures such as tone voice and clothing choice. Various nonverbal messages are modified according to the ability of each Poyok.

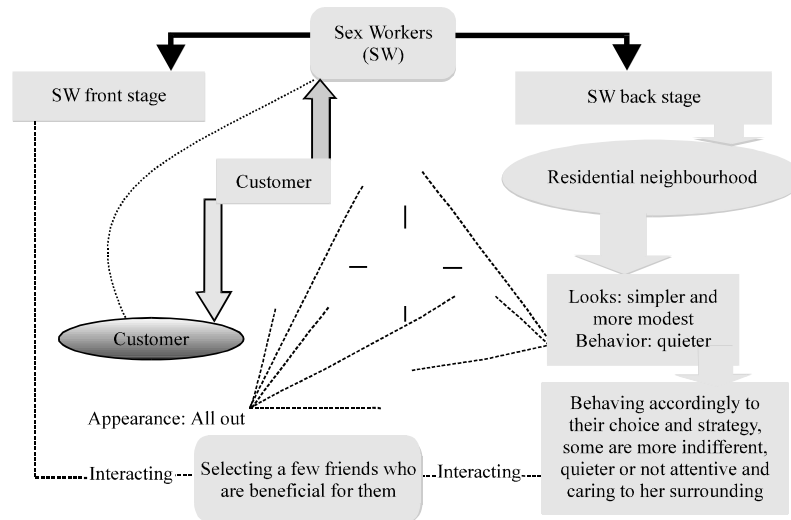


Fig. 1: Front and back stage model sex workers (divorcee and women home maker)

Deddy and Salatun (2007) wrote that body language is a sign language that uses symbols to seduce prospective clients. Head movements are also part of sign language or body language, for example, nodding the head as a sign of agreement or shaking the head as a sign of rejection (Hafied, 2009).

Head movement by the sex worker when interacting with potential customers can be divided into two stages. The first stage is when she acts cute to seduce the customers with the aim of squandering more money. In this stage she would act hard to get and not aggressive while subtly give the men a side look. The second stage is when she is giving the sexual services. When she thought she has done a man a service, she would hold up her to signify pride of her ability in giving a man pleasures.

According to Littlejohn (1996), appearance is the symbol of a deeper aspect of one's identity, so that others will see her just from her looks. On the front stage, sex workers will wear sexy revealing clothes, showing off their assets, completed with matching accessories. They are always give it all in terms of their outlook.

Not only that, facial expression is the most important things as a hint of one's feelings. Dale Leather in Rakhmat (2007) wrote that the face has long been a source of information in interpersonal communication. In this case facial expressions displayed by the sex workers when interacting with customers are also divided into two groups. The first group is facial expression when meeting customers, talk elegantly and gently like a decent classy woman, all things men dream of who could satisfy all their needs. However, no matter how creative they are the sex workers way is signature of women having sex for money and most of the time insincere and more like a routine.

The following is a dramaturgy model illustration for both the front and back stage performed by these workers (Poyok) (Fig. 1).

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that in living a double life, the women put themselves into a lot of trouble. In overcoming the difficulties at the front stage to show what can she do to please customers she would go to a lengthy of efforts at the end to earn her more money while in the back stage she tries her best to look like an ordinary woman who are not involved in prostitution.

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