

The Construction of Urban Single Career Woman in Indonesian Chick Lit, *Jodoh Monica*

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Abstract: The text of urban single career women in *Jodoh Monica* is constructed to be negative and unfavorable as opposed to the text of married women, which is positive and favorable. The construction of both texts is based on a patriarchal ideology that is deeply rooted in every aspect of Indonesian family and social lives that Monica, the protagonist in *Jodoh Monica*, takes a subject position in this the patriarchal discourse of gender role. The text of urban single career woman in *Jodoh Monica* seeks to conform rather than challenge the patriarchal ideology.

Key words: patriarchal ideology, subject position, discourse, power relations, regime of truth, construction of text

Chick lit is defined as a 'literary genre that features books written by women and focusing on young, quirky, female protagonists' (Wordspy.com) that gained its popularity in 1997 with the publication of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*. This novel is considered to be the first novel of this literary subgenre and when it was made into the film version with Renée Zellweger starring as Bridget Jones, its position as a 'must read' book, especially among urban young single women, is further acclaimed. Following the success of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, successive strings of other successful titles like *Shopaholic*, *Can You Keep a Secret?* by Sophie Kinsella, *Jemima Jones* and *Mr. Maybe* by Jane Green, were enthusiastically welcome by the chick lit readers. The steady selling of chick lit has made big publishers like Harlequin, and Simon and Schuster to launch new imprints for this genre under the name of Red Dress Ink and Downtown Press. Other publishers like Ballantine, Avon and Plume, also dedicate a portion of their list for chick lit. Harlequin, best-known publisher of romance novels, and Simon and Schuster have obviously seen a potential market that new imprints are dedicated solely for the

publication of this genre. Thus, we can expect that chick lit will not be just a temporary trend because the industry involved in the publishing and marketing of chick lit really means it to be serious business and it will ensure that chick lit will have wider readership.

How would a reader know that she is reading a chick lit or not? A British chick lit is usually written based on a formula. The main character is an anti role model. She is usually a cosmopolitan single in her late twenties or beginning thirties, has a career although not very successful in a media related company, adores the latest fashion, spends more than she could afford, meets several Mr. Wrongs whom she usually thinks as Mr. Right, enjoys sex but thinks that she does not have enough and has several other weaknesses that label her as superficial. Despite these shortcomings, she is warm, brave, generous, loyal to her friends and very naive when it comes to love relationship. Even though romance is one of its important elements, a chick lit focuses more on how the protagonist search for her identity as an urban single woman amidst her career, social life and family problems. The comical way in which the protagonist relates her responses, thought and feelings over her predicaments as a single in an urban modern surrounding, makes her a loveable person whom the reader can identify with.

The identification with the main character means that chick lit has been successful in 'interpellating' its readers. Althusser explains this process of 'interpellation' as 'the ways in which individuals are interpellated into subject positions by a process of identification . . . by an act of recognition: 'yes, that's me, yes, that's how it is' (Giles and Middleton, 1999, p. 40). The chick lit readers can see themselves in the lives of Bridget Jones (in *Bridget Jones's Diary*), Becky Bloomwood (in *Shopaholic*), Emma Corrigan (in *Can You Keep a Secret?*) and other loveable protagonists; to laugh with them over some cheery incidents, to worry with them when they are caught in the middle of a problem and to be miserable with them when they are in a danger of losing the men they love. In a sense, chick lit offers a light reading over a 'serious' problem, the shadow of becoming a spinster or an old maid, a condition that most women fear, by calming the possible hysteria with the existence of a Mr. Right for each of the protagonist. In a sense, the successful 'interpellation' means that chick lit has identified real problems faced by urban single young career women who adopt new sets of norms and values in their 'new' status as women who produce rather than just consume, an identity

usually attached to them. With this 'new' status, new problems come along; problems that mothers have no advice to give. The problems tackled by chick lit are problems for a generation that has broken their relation to the previous one. It is in this niche that chick lit finds its readers, a book that gives empathy without lecturing that says, 'Hey, you are not alone. Don't worry, you can also be happy,' like the protagonists. The problems facing the women in this situation seem to be universal ones as British chick lit enjoys its popularity outside Britain and are translated into several languages.

In Indonesia, the popularity of chick lit starts with the translated version of British chick lit for the Indonesian readers. Titles like the ones mentioned above, were among the first titles that were translated in 2003 by Gramedia, one of the biggest publishing companies in Indonesia. Its candy-color cover and its cartoon style pictures on both ends of the cover make it stand out on the shelves of any bookstores. It is difficult to mistake a chick lit from another literary genre as the motto 'being single and happy' is printed boldly on the right top side of the front cover of every chick lit and the target readers, defined in a sentence printed in the inside front cover, are 'the young women who are smart, independent, brave, honest to herself . . . the cosmopolitan women who are generally single, have careers and struggling with the problems of modern life'. The accessibility of these translated versions and the price of the novels that is relatively within the buying power of the readers, allow a wider range of circulation of these novels.

The positive response of the market on the potential readership of chick lit encourages Indonesian female writers to write Indonesian chick lit, using a similar formula, but substitutes the settings and characters with the local colors. The first two Indonesian chick lit are, *Jodoh Monica* by Alberthiene Endah (2004) and *Cintapuccino* by Ica Rahmanti. Both writers acknowledged that it was the popularity of the translated chick lit that caused them to write their own version and interpretation of what constitutes an Indonesian chick lit. Even though *Jodoh Monica* is the first Indonesian chick lit, it is not as popular as *Cintapuccino*, which is listed as bestseller ('Buku Laris', Kompas, Oct 23, 2004) and has been reprinted several times. Successive titles then rapidly follow, they are *Cinta Kuya* by Charmantha S. Adji, *Cewek Matre* by Alberthiene Endah and *Subject: Re:* by Novita Estiti. In just months we have five titles of Indonesian chick lit and I think other titles will quickly follow. It seems that Indonesian

young women writers have also seen a bright potential market for their Indonesian chick lit. Even though the basic formula is still there, Indonesian chick lit has made some adaptations. The most significant one is the motto 'being single and happy,' which is always printed on the cover of the translated novel, is replaced with '*Lajang Kota*' (being urban single), '*chick lit buatan Indonesia asli*' (genuine Indonesian chick lit) or '*chick lit ngepop Indonesia*' (Indonesian popular chick lit). The omission of the word 'happy' is significant in a sense that a patriarchal discourse on happiness for a woman is already instilled in that a woman cannot be happy if she is single.

The absence of the word 'happy' in its motto is 'problematic'. According to Althusser, 'a problematic is the assumptions, motivations, underlying ideas, etc. from which a cultural text (say, an advert) is made . . . [as] a text is structured as much by what is absent (what is not said) as by what is present (what is said)' (in Storey, 2001, p. 96). The motto suggests a pre-assumption that you cannot be happy if you are single. This assumption is underlying the plot of *Jodoh Monica*. Monica, the protagonist, is not happy with her life despite her successful career, because she is single. Even though *Jodoh Monica* has the characteristics of the British chick lit in its format, and explicitly admits the influence of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *In Her Shoes* by Jennifer Weiner as the model of its writing, such as the age, profession and the superficiality of the protagonist, the similarities stop there. It is much more serious in its tone and its treatment of the problem of being single. It is the very aspect that makes this novel interesting to be read as a text in regards of its 'seriousness' in dealing with the problem of being single and of the fear of living as an old maid in the Indonesian context. In this novel, singleness as a text is constructed in the family as well as in social lives that it is internalized by Monica that it is impossible to be happy if you are still single in the age of 34. The text of a single career woman is constructed in the power relations that are present in age difference, gender roles and social interactions that speak of the patriarchal ideology in dealing with knowledge and truth.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEXT OF A SINGLE CAREER WOMAN

Monica, the female protagonist in *Jodoh Monica*, is 34, a successful career woman who has a position as a creative director of an advertising agency based on Jalan Sudirman in Jakarta. As a single, she lives in an apartment in Rasuna Said, which has a twenty-four hour security guard who always confirms any guest visiting Monica's apartment, and a balcony that overlooks the city skyline. She reads chick lit, Cosmo and InStyle; visits QB; listens to Alanis; shops at Sogo as well as Mangga Dua; wears Esprit, M-phosis, Mango, U-2; carries Louis Vuitton and Prada; puts on Manolo Blahnik; uses Kanebo; visits beauty saloons on regular basis; exercises regularly; drinks coffee at Starbucks; stocks on frozen foods and snacks on pistachios.

The cultural products she consumes and the leisure activities she leads confirm her position of belonging to a certain class. The place where Monica lives, the apartment as well as the location, bespeaks of her identity as a modern middleclass member of the society. 'Commodities confer prestige and signify social value, status and power in the context of cultural meanings that derive from wider 'social order. Thus, codes of similarity and difference in consumer goods are used to signify social affiliation' (Baudrillard as quoted in Barker, 2003, p. 165). This lifestyle, understood in this context, reflects how she has positioned herself as middle class, fashion conscious, smart and financially independent. As a single career woman who lives in Jakarta, she is actively utilizing the modern conveniences a cosmopolitan city can possibly offer. She is the 'new' generation of single women who do not just stay at home and keep the house for her aging parents or married siblings as what is traditionally expected of Indonesian 'old maids'. She is an independent single who becomes a producer as well as a consumer in the economic activity of a cosmopolitan city like Jakarta.

Understood in the context of a patriarchal discourse, Monica is not happy despite the successful career, financial independence and convenient life; she is haunted by her status as a single. It makes her feel incomplete as a woman because a woman of her age 'should' already have a man as her mate. Her description of her condition can be seen in the following statement.

Aku sudah tua. . . . kenapa jodoh belum juga datang? . . . Aku ingin jujur bahwa aku sedih dan depresi karena statusku. . . . Betapa melelahkannya tampil menjadi wanita metropolitan yang terlihat jaya dengan kemandiriaannya, padahal jauh di lubuk hatiku bergejolak kerinduan akan perasaan yang paling primitif: Ingin dicintai dan mencintai. (Endah, 2004, pp. 12-13)

In her statement, Monica describes herself as being already 'old'. She is worried over her status as a single because most women of her age would already get married. Monica describes her self-sufficiency as a successful metropolitan woman as a façade to cover up the emptiness she feels because of the absence of a man in her life. She wants to be loved and also to love.

She is under the impression that man and marriage are identical with love and without which the life of a woman, however successful she is, is an empty shell. Monica draws a rigid line over what does and does not make a woman happy. Because of this rigid segregation, she cannot shift her subject position that defines a woman's happiness in the *presence* of a man's love, to a position that defines happiness in the *absence* of that love. The love should come from a man and without which, a woman's life would never be fulfilled. She has never even considered that she can find fulfillment in her career and independence, because these elements are not the ones she is taught to believe in.

As she has taken her subject position in the patriarchal discourse of gender role, she regards her unmarried status as her shortcoming and blames herself to be so undesirable that she cannot even attract a single man to desire her enough to marry her. She then compensates her shortcomings by taking extra care on her physical appearance, thinking that by doing so, she might be able to compensate her shortcoming. She describes this in the following statement.

Aku dengan statusku yang belum laku, akan tambah tersudut bila orang melihatku sebagai wanita berpenampilan minus, di bawah standard, atau apapun yang bisa menegaskan aku sebagai orang yang selayaknya memang tidak laku.

Ini baru soal fisik. Soal psikis lebih berat lagi. Rasanya tak perlu kujelaskan. Yang pasti ketakutanku yang terbesar berada di dalam pesta pernikahan adalah jika tiba tiba aku maenjadi seorang diri di dalamnya, dan orang orang memandang ke arahku dengan rasa

kasihan. Ketakutan kedua, bila orang-orang mulai menyadari kehadiranku, keadaanku, dan akhirnya bertanya, "Kamu kapan menikah?" (p. 17)

It is interesting to see how Monica describes herself as unsold goods, not good or attractive enough to attract a man to want to 'buy' her. She sees herself as a commodity to be 'sold' to a man to 'buy' her. Because the goods are unsold, she then adorns herself to have the qualities that might meet the demand of the buyer. She positions herself in a passive role, to be appraised by a man. She does not position herself to be in the active role, to be the one who initiates the search for a man. Instead, she is wallowing in self-pity and self-blame. Her brilliant career and her independent life styles do not exist because she only sees herself as a 'woman' *per se* whose highest achievement is to be married and have children, especially when she is already thirty-four. Her intelligence that has made it possible for her to be successful in her career is not functioning in regards to her status. Logic and emotion are two separate spheres for Monica. In regards to her status, she completely submits to the 'logic' of the society.

Monica's interpretation of her being single in her age as abnormal and wrong reveals her idea of what is normal and right. She comes to this knowledge of what is normal and abnormal, right from wrong as a consequence of acculturation. Acculturation is 'socialisation to describe the process by which we become social and cultural being' (Barker, 2004, p. 7) and '[a]cculturated members of a society know the codes for their society because [c]odes are cultural in a sense that they are the expression of a people's shared convention at a particular time' (p. 33). As the product of the society that shares a patriarchal discourse, Monica lives her life within the shared codes. This is a result of what she has learned as she is a social being who is culturally constructed.

For Foucault, this knowledge a person believes in can be counted as 'truth' which is 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true. . . . A 'regime' of truth' (Rabinow, 1984, p. 74). A regime of truth is a series of norms or values considered to be right or wrong, which are ideological, and operates in the level of superstructure in a particular discourse. This truth is not universal, but specific to particular historical context. In this case, the context that I am referring to is the early 2000 when there are more and more educated young women in Indonesia who choose to stay

in big cities to pursue their career, until they are suddenly reminded by their families and married friends of their single status. The families' and friends' opinions, then, become a regime of truth, because Monica also shares the same values and norms as her families and friends.

A regime of truth on being single can be traced from the definitions in the dictionary in defining different states of being single as 'single', 'old maid', 'spinster' and 'bachelor'. A definition in a dictionary is usually considered to be the 'only true' definition that becomes an accepted reference. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines 'single' for people as 'not married' and 'not involved in romantic relationship'. 'Old maid' is defined as 'an offensive expression meaning a woman who has never married and is not young anymore' and 'someone who pays too much attention to unimportant matters and has old-fashioned ideas'. A 'spinster' is defined as 'an unmarried woman, usually one who is no longer young and seems unlikely to marry', whereas a 'bachelor' is defined as 'a man who has never been married'. These definitions, taken from a dictionary, a reference which is believed to be the source of 'true knowledge' shows a negative connotation to an unmarried woman by referring to her age, her being gossipy and old fashioned; yet an unmarried man is defined more favorably by not attaching negative connotation to his unmarried condition. Because the word 'single' can refer to a woman as well as to a man, it bears no negative connotation. To resist the negative connotations on single women, the words 'single girl', 'bachelorette' and 'bachelor girl' (Israel, 2002) are used in favor of single career women.

In the novel, Monica defines herself as *perawan tua* (an old virgin), the English equivalent of 'old maid'. The slight difference in the Indonesian context is in the emphasis of her virginal state because a woman who is not yet married should keep her virginity. So, in a sense, the unmarried woman is denied sex until she dies. Her being a good woman or not, depends largely on how she keeps her purity. Sexual activity, which is in the private sphere of any woman, is regulated by 'power' outside herself. The same demand is never suggested for an unmarried man. Thus we can see how a patriarchal discourse is being exercised in the level of the unconscious and becomes an ideology that regulates the practices in the society. Barthes refers to this interplay as a 'myth' which he defines as 'depoliticized speech,' which is 'the most appropriate instrument for the ideological inversion which defines this society: at all levels of human communication' and gives 'a *natural* image

of this reality' (Barthes, 1973, p. 142). Monica accepts it to be 'natural' that she remains a virgin until she is married and if she breaks this code, it will make her to be 'unnatural' in a sense that she becomes an easy woman who gives her favor freely. Yet, for a man, he is expected to be knowledgeable on sex when he is married and no negative stigma would be accused to him. Thus Monica acts within this discourse as *perawan tua*, making sense that this is the 'right' thing for her to do, the truth of which ideology she never questions.

One incident in the novel describes Monica who has no sexual experience, yet it does not mean that she has no desire for one.

"Aku udah lama nggak minum pil. Jangan-jangan yang semalam 'jadi' nih...", celetuk Marry suatu kali. Dia model sembilan belas tahun. Cara bicaranya santai orang membicarakan warna cat rumah. . . . Gadis-gadis muda itu sungguh seperti api siap membakar sumbu petasan yang bertengger di kepalaku. Rasanya mau marah! Bagaimana tidak naik pitam. Mereka betul betul kurang ajar. Bicara soal tempat tidur di depan mukaku. Pertama, mereka masih berusia belasan tahun. Belum cukup umur untuk menggunjing trik bergulat di tempat tidur. Kedua, berani-beraninya mereka sudah pernah melakukan, sedangkan aku belum! (Endah, 1004, p. 63)

Monica's judgment on Marry and her friends is based on the ideology that a woman should keep her purity before they get married, especially for a young single woman. Her 'truth' on what is right and wrong to do for a single woman, makes her judges other on her concept of morality. She sees her judgment as an age-appropriate behavior, because she is older and in this context, age becomes a signifier that signified wisdom and knowledge, therefore she has the power in deciding what is morally right and wrong. Yet, she also expresses a deep anger and frustration of not being able to express that anger for the jealousy she feels toward the younger woman who has the courage to do things that she has no courage to do so. In the hierarchy of age, an older person is supposed to have more experience than a younger one and to find a younger woman has had sex and she has not had one, makes her feel robbed of her 'rights'. Monica is faced with another discourse that the younger woman makes sense of herself, thus single career woman becomes the site of struggle over meanings from different discourses. 'Discourse regulates not only what can be said under determinate social and cultural conditions but also who

can speak, when and where. Specifically, the regimes of truth of modernity involve relations of power/knowledge whereby knowledge is a form of power implicated in the production of subjectivity' (Barker, 2003, pp. 200-201).

Monica's judgment is based on certain norms and values, which she believes to be the 'truth', she lives by those norms and values and at the same time judges others using that discourse. It is in this subject position that she tries to make sense of her condition as *perawan tua*. Foucault states that

subjectivity is a discursive production. That is, discourse (as regulated ways of speaking/practice) enables persons to come into existence. It does this by offering us subject positions from which to make sense of the world while 'subjecting' speakers to discourse. A subject position is that perspective or set of regulated discursive meanings from which discourse makes sense. To speak is to take up a pre-existent subject position and to be subjected to the regulatory power of that discourse. (quoted in Barker, 2003, p. 229)

The subject position Monica takes, renders her to live in the sets of norms applied to her condition and using those norms to regard other single women. The construction of the subject as the effect of a discourse is the consequences of acculturation by the society where she lives. The sets of norms by which she lives are constructed by agents of power that share the same discourse.

Age as a signifier is signified differently in the Indonesian culture, that the bigger the number of your age, the more wisdom that you should have. This concept brings a consequence in that a younger person is readily forgiven if she 'breaks' social norms or rules in the excuse that she is still young and reckless and is deemed to make mistakes. But when she is older, she should have learned from her mistakes and experience, therefore she should be wise. A mistake done by an older person will be judged harshly. In Monica's case, she is remorseful when she remembers the norms by which she lived when she was still young. When Monica is in her college age, she lives by different sets of norms and beliefs of what is and is not important for a woman.

Waktu aku kuliah IP selalu mendekati angka empat. Dipuja-puja mahasiswa se-angkatan sebagai cewek cerdas. Kupikir, itulah kondisi terbaik bagi seorang wanita muda seperti diriku. Dan aku

lupa mengasah modalku yang lain untuk masa depan. Pacaran. . . . Aku sama sekali tak terpikir untuk menyisakan waktu bagi sebuah kata bernama pacar. Tidak. . . . Kupikir, jika kuliahku tuntas dan aku beroleh karier bagus, maka akan kudapatkan dengan mudah pria yang top. (Endah, 2004, p. 85)

When she was young and admired by her peers, Monica regards her intelligence to be a capital that could ensure her a bright future. This quote connotes the sense of regret that she was not smart enough to secure herself a man when she has all to offer, youth and intellectually. In the present context, she voices no pride over her choice and her present achievement. Her good career and independence are reduced to meaninglessness over what she thinks to be the most important thing in the life of a woman, however successful she is, that is the presence of a man in her life. She regrets the norms and values by which she led her life as a young woman. There is also a sense of justifying her present knowledge because she is older and wiser and still unmarried. Age and gender are social construction and they are ‘the most important shapers of social experience for individuals’ (Baldwin, 2004, p. 124). It is in this discourse of age and gender that Monica takes her subject positioning. The construction of singleness for a woman is then ‘internalized’ as something natural. She is ‘forced’ to leave the norms she lives by as a young woman, because the patriarchal discourse does not acknowledge her form of reasoning. The practices in this discourse only acknowledge a woman to be under the protection of her family before her marriageable age and when she is of age, she should get married and under the protection of her husband. Single women marriageable age is an unintelligible practice; therefore they are marginalized and alienated. In Foucault’s concept, the power controls not through repression but stimulation (1980, p. 57). The stimulation can be in many forms of persuasion and in the case of Monica, it is through advices, other single women’s regrets and her alienation. The unintelligibility of her reasoning has caused her to be alienated; therefore, she has to embrace the same norms to make herself intelligible.

As a consequence of this positioning, she also regards others who are older and of the opposite gender to be the agents of truth who have the power over her, that they give her the new meanings of her existence. In the discourse related to age and gender, her grandmother and mother are the agents of this ‘truth’.

Menurut Nenek yang sangat percaya pada kisah kisah leluhur, ada segelintir perempuan yang memang kurang beruntung dalam hal cinta. Berusaha sekeras apapun, tetap saja tidak dihampiri jodoh. Itu tandanya ada sesuatu di dalam tubuhnya yang perlu “dibuka.” Digosok pamornya. Di kampung Nenek, di Yogya, perempuan-perempuan yang sulit joooh dimandikan kembang tujuh rupa. Diiringi doa-doa. (Endah, 2004, p. 161)

Ibu pasti menganggap ku sebagai anak yang kena kutuk. . . Dan buat beliau, karier setinggi langit . . . dan kehidupan lajang yang makin dinikmati, tak ada artinya dibanding jodoh. Bagi Ibu jodoh adalah anugerah tertinggi dalam kehidupan wanita. Ibaratnya, wanita baru bisa dibilang cukup bila ada pendamping. Kondisiku sekarang bagi Ibu adalah abnormal. (p. 251)

From these two quotations, the grandmother and the mother take a subject position in a patriarchal discourse that they inherit to the younger generation and relate the same norms and values on them. Their positions as the older women commend respect and even though their old fashioned ways are being questioned, the discourse that they attach to single career woman is believed to be the truth and working as a myth, it becomes naturalized from generation to generation. “Culture naturalized age, as it also naturalizes genderThe apparent natural process of the person’s passage from birth to death in chronological time is ordered, sometimes controlled, but always shaped by cultural ideas of what is appropriate and conventional behaviour at certain ages” (Baldwin et al., 2004, p. 124). In the ‘passage of rite’ for Monica, it is her time to already get married, and when she is not in this state, she is not doing the age-appropriation conduct, thus, she is deemed to be not normal, not only by her mother, but also by herself.

This belief is further confirmed by Kassandra, her best friend, and a married woman. Kassandra is considered to have power/ knowledge as she has a real experience as a single woman who regrets forfeiting the love of a man until it is too late for her. Iin, as a married woman, is also considered to be wiser as she has done the age-appropriate conduct, to be married in her age and not chasing a career. Below are two quotations that describe the point of views of Kassandra and Iin regarding the importance of being married for a woman of Monica’s age.

“Ketika dia (Kassandra’s ex-boyfriend) lulus, dia ingin segera menikahiku. Tapi saat itu aku sedang menggarap skripsi. Dan usiaku baru dua puluh tiga. Aku menolak mentah-mentah . . . Tiba-tiba ada perasaan sesal yang begitu hebat berontak di dalam hatiku. . . . Aku benar-benar mencintainya. Aku tak pernah menyangka penolakanku untuk menikah di usia muda, sanggup membuatnya seperti kehilangan perasaan. . . . Dia pulang. Dengan istrinya. Wanita Belanda yang dinikahnya dua tahun lalu . . . aku sebetulnya perempuan yang rapuh. Yang keropos. Bolong. Aku tertawa di atas kulit, bukan dari hati.” (Endah, 2004, pp. 125-134)

“Masih saja betah sendiriIngat umur lho. Nggak iri melihat Angelica,” tutur Iin. (pp. 52-53)

The advice from the older people which has constructed Monica’s perception on the ills of women of her age who is still a single, is proved in the reality she experiences when Kassandra, her best friend who also a single, regrets her past judgment in choosing education over marriage. She has to pay for her ‘mistake’ by being miserable, because the career and independence she has cannot compensate for the ‘lost’ love. Kassandra’s reasoning as a young woman is similar to that of the young Monica and she also experiences alienation for her unconformity. She has refused a man’s proposal for a marriage in favor of an education and in a patriarchal discourse this kind of reasoning is not acknowledged. A woman who choose education over marriage, deserves to be miserable, as she is considered to go against her nature This becomes an ideology saying that happiness for a woman is in a marriage and nothing can replaces it, so a woman should not choose education and career over a man. If it is done, she will live a life of misery as an old maid. A woman who is married like Iin has no regret and she appears to have no envy over Monica’s success, because she finds fulfillment in her marriage. There is a very rigid line dividing women into two opposing groups, the unhappy single career woman and the happy married woman. Other discourse that portrays a happy single career woman, a happy married career woman or an unhappy married woman are rejected as they do not conform to the ideology that is at play.

The myth of the segregation of gender roles that a woman’s place is at home and a man’s is in the public sphere is confirmed through the discursive practices in the society. There is a sense of determinism that a

‘normal’ woman should not feel happy if she takes up the role given to man, if she says she is happy, it is either she is lying or that she is ‘abnormal’. When the same ideology is shared it becomes the dominant culture in the struggle over meanings of being single. The ideology that a woman does not need a man to be happy becomes an emergent culture as shared by the teenage model like Marry that might later become a dominant culture. Referring to the motto on the cover of the novel, the omission of the word ‘happy’ for a single woman is emphasized in the lives of the single career women in this novel. The assumption that a woman cannot and should not be happy when she is single is already taken as position from which this novel is written. The underlying ideology of this novel is addressed by utilizing a fictional narration, which disguises its power through empathy and a presentation of a ‘reality.’

In Gramsci’s term, there is hegemony over the ideology that is constructed around the common sense and universality over gender role. Women come to believe their role in a patriarchal discourse through ‘a high degree of consensus’ and ‘hegemony is maintained (and must continually maintained: it is an ongoing process) by dominant groups and classes ‘negotiating’ with, and making concession to, subordinate groups and classes’ (Storey, 2001, p. 104). In a patriarchal discourse, women are in subordinate groups and through consensus, they become the agents to maintain the dominant ideology as seen in how the female characters of grandmother, mother, Monica, Cassandra and Iin support the ideology. The emergent culture that speaks of an ideology contrary to the dominant one is able to negotiate, but this ideology is emergent because taken only when the women are young and are not concerned over marriage, but like what Cassandra has suggested, young women often make mistakes in their decision. When these women reach a certain marriageable age, they will be usurped by the dominant ideology through their consent. In this way, the hegemony of this patriarchal ideology is maintained.

The male character in the novel also takes a subject position of a patriarchal discourse. In the following quotation, Arya (Monica’s colleague and her later boyfriend), expresses his insecurity as a man when he has to face successful women.

“Kadang aku berpikir, betapa kasihannya laki-laki zaman sekarang,” ucap Arya. “Emansipasi direspons wanita dengan sangat antusias. Mereka sekolah tinggi-tinggi, mengejar karier seperti orang kesetanan, melapisi diri dengan kemampuan yang sulit

tertandingi. Sementara kami, kaum pria, terjebak dalam persaingan yang kian ketat. Harus pula bergulat dalam era saat tuntutan wanita terhadap kami semakin tinggi saja. Mencari istri tak sesimple zaman dulu. Wanita sekarang memandang pria seperti juri menilai murid ujian. . . .” (Endah, 2004, pp. 186-187)

What is expressed from this is a kind of complain that life is not so easy for men especially when they have to find a woman to marry. The educated women who have career become a threat to his masculinity. Not only does he have to compete with his own sex, he also has to compete with these financially successful women. The need to compete with a woman and to be able to at least become an equal if not more superior is regarded as a threat, because the patriarchal discourse dictates a man to be superior to a woman. His inability to compete is seen as a castration of his masculinity. According to Barker, the source of this feeling can be traced in the division of gender roles.

The modernist division of labour gave men the role of providing the wages of survival and women the domestic duties of child rearing and housekeeping. Consequently, the language of modernity stresses the gulf between the feminine-coded private world and the masculine-coded public. In the latter, men have been acculturated to seek esteem through public performance and the recognition of achievement. This can take many forms, from violence through sport to educational qualifications and occupational status. (2003, pp. 301-302)

Put in such rigid definition of what makes a man, his inability to fulfill the demand in this discourse will make him less of a man. This becomes more problematic when women, who are supposed in a subordinate class take over the domain reserved for men and in some cases able to excel like Monica. In this condition, a man would find himself unsettled when his role is taken over and does not know where to place himself. As a consequence to this confusion, he resorts to criticism, putting himself in a subject position, which regards woman's emancipation to be against nature.

Despite Monica's higher position in the office hierarchy than Arya, when it comes to know what a man wants from a woman, she puts Arya as bearing the regime of truth. Because of her subject position in a

patriarchal discourse, she regards Arya, as a man, to be ‘naturally’ superior in his knowledge of what a man wants from a woman.

“Pria, sekagum apa pun terhadap wanita yang cerdas dan sukses . . . ketika dia memikirkan tempat tidur, maka yang dia inginkan adalah wanita yang manja, seksi, mengundang. Pada detik itu, dia tidak akan memikirkan berapa IQ wanita pasangannya . . . dia mendambakan wanita yang luwes membuat kopi, memasak sedikit, dan menciumi rambutnya . . . “ Arya menerawang. (Endah, 2004, p. 190)

Arya’s definition of a desirable woman is in term of her sexual prowess and her cooking competence. He defines the desirable qualities of a woman in her capacity to serve a man, as she is reduced to a sexual object created to serve a man’s needs. Arya’s ways of seeing a woman can be considered as a male’s gaze, to borrow Laura Mulvey’s term in describing the politics of the gaze on films (Storey, 2001). Everything he describes is to serve the needs of a man. Again, this is the defensive position he takes in order to maintain his dominant position of a man by belittling a woman’s intellectual capability, which might be superior from a man. Actually this is a man’s cry over his fear of losing his superior and dominant position in the cultural hierarchy. As Arya is made to be the bearer of truth, he becomes the agent that confirms the ideology that a woman is born to be a seducer, a mate for a man. The meaning of a woman’s existence is reduced to that of as a sexual object whose main goal is to sexually satisfy a man. As this is supposed to be her natural role, she does not need to be intelligent and compete with a man in his role as a breadwinner. Underlying this text is the suggestion that a woman like Monica should forfeit her ambition and career as it is not natural for her to be such. Relating this quotation to the previous one, it is obvious that Arya is basically upset by a woman like Monica as she has thrown him out of balance. As he is reared in the discursive practices that do not acknowledge other alternative discourse, he finds himself to be unable to make sense of the world around him; therefore he tries to recover the ‘balance’ and to speak in the discourse that make sense to him.

His act of ‘interpellation’ is successful when Monica finds Arya’s definitions of a desirable woman to be enlightening, *“Dia seutuhnya, pria yang berperasaan . . . dan astaga! Sangat menarik! . . . Kuakui, segala yang diucapkan Arya malam ini benar-benar penuh makna”* (pp. 190-

191). Instead of being offended in Arya's belittling a woman in general, Monica totally agrees with this opinion. She finds his opinion to be enlightening as she finds guidance in his advice on how to seduce a man and attract a man, as she is in a desperate position to find one. Once again, she puts Arya in the position of power that bears the knowledge that she regards as the truth that might guide her to find what she wants. Monica's sympathetic acceptance over Arya's advice suggests the interplay of the power relation between man and woman. Monica has put Arya in the position of power without him asking her to do so. His 'persuasion' works effectively to secure him a position of power and thus reconfirms the subordination of woman. A man is regarded to the position of all knowing that his words should be listened to.

Ironically, this is also from this position that she looks at other 'old maids' who are not in her social and intellectual level. In her relations to the other 'old maids', she assumes the position of power because of her higher position in the professional hierarchy, her obvious more sophisticated life styles and her intellectual ability that even though she is an 'old maid', she is not the stereotypical old maid. The cultural construction of an old maid is that she has lots of the negative stigma ('judes, sewot, galak atau angker') (Endah, 2004, p. 164). Betsy Israel in her book *Bachelor Girl* suggests that the cultural products around us have drawn very unfavorable pictures of an old maid, the most memorable ones are Dicken's Miss Havisham and Cinderella's two stepsisters who are either too thin or too fat, selfish, frightening and the negative list can go on and on. These are the typical traits of old maids by traditional cultural construction as they are set in the Victorian era. The contemporary old maid, which is more favorably called as a single woman, is set in the urban cosmopolitan cities, as an independent working girl.

Although set in the same time setting, Monica describes the other single working women like herself in the first criteria. She describes Elvara, 37 as sharp mouthed; Theodora, 36, as physically undesirable and uncommunicative; Tati, 36, as overweight and a liar; and Pritta, almost 39, as breast less. By pointing to their weaknesses using a male's gaze, Monica is actually trying to say that they deserve to be undesirable in a man's eyes. At the same time, she takes a detached position from this group, saying that she is not like them because she is a single woman as represented in the contemporary cultural products that she takes pain to refer to. She constructs herself using 'self-conscious intertextuality'

(Barker, 2003, p. 209) from films, starring Sandra Bullock and Renée Zellweger as single, to the kinds of singles constructed in *Cosmo* and chick lit. And her confusion is mounted when she has loyally followed all the tips and tricks; yet, she is unable to attract a man.

When she is finally able to secure herself a man, Mike, temporarily she leaves the norms that dictate her to keep her 'purity' as a single woman in the name of love.

Semalam memang istimewa. Aku tak perlu bercerita panjang-lebar. Mike tak berhenti memuji-muji diriku sepanjang malam dan kami bahkan larut tanpa tahu siapa yang memulai. Kupikir, permainan itu akan lama. Nyatanya hanya sebentar. Tak apa. Pengalaman pertama. Apalagi kulihat Mike tidur dengan dengkur halus yang merata. Dia damai. Dia puas. Pasti. (Endah, 2004, pp. 305-306)

Monica describes her first sexual intercourse as a special event, yet there is an absence of her description of her own feeling. As an experience that she has been waiting for a quite a long time, there is a sense of disappointment over the whole experience. This event might be seen as a 'victory' of her resistance over the norms dictated to single woman, that she listens more to what she desires. Yet, even in this private sphere, Monica is not wholly free to be herself. She does not regret the unsatisfying sexual encounter because she sees that Mike is satisfied with the experience. I see that it is very difficult for Monica not to measure what she wants from a man's point of view because she has confirmed her subject positioning in the patriarchal discourse that she cannot get out from the enclosure of the discourse. She identifies her fulfillment in Mike's and she does not even consider that she also has her rights to enjoy sex. Her fear to be labeled as '*perempuan bandel*' (p. 305) has curbed any question over her own enjoyment. Despite the seeming successful rebellion against the norms, a single woman like Monica is still judged using the exact same discourse that consistently underlies every single text.

Moreover, her sexual action is not an independent event because her 'submission' is a calculative one. It is in the context of her effort to secure herself a husband. Even though she lives in Jakarta she is not aware of the common practices of casual sex.

Sungguh tolol diriku. Sekian lama jadi orang Jakarta, tapi baru kusadari di Jakarta sepasang pria dan wanita bahkan bisa tidur bersama hanya setelah merasa dekat selama dua hari. (p. 305)

Despite her age and intelligence, she is naive when it comes to sex. For her, sex should lead to marriage; therefore, Mike's rejection to marry her has never come to her mind. Her 'conversation' with Mike is done through SMS.

[Monica] *Wanita mana yang mau pacaran tanpa dinikahi?*

[Mike] . . . *Kamu. Itu sebabnya aku mengagumimu.*

[Monica] ***Aku mulai naik darah. Kamu salah. Kamu hanya menghabiskan waktuku!!!*** (p. 328)

Even though the text explicitly takes Monica's side and judges Mike's irresponsible action, I find that Mike's treatment of Monica is on equal footing. He makes no demand of what constitutes an ideal woman like Arya has done and he regards their sexual relationship on equal ground, as two adults wanting the same thing. Monica who is in a completely different position does not understand the subject position that he takes. Monica is the one who puts herself in Mike's mercy, she is totally dependent on what Mike wants, whether to marry her or not. His unconformity to the expectation, has earned him a negative label of being irresponsible and a womanizer.

Despite the practices that faithfully operate within the patriarchal discourse in signifying a single woman, Monica gets her men in her own term. After she loses Mike, Arya proposes to her despite his definition of the qualities of a desirable woman.

*Mataku mengraih pada Arya. Pria itu tersenyum ke arahku dengan sorot mata yang . . . astaga, Dia sangat . . . sangat . . . romantis. Beberapa detik aku terpana. Tak tahu harus tertawa atau tertawa. Ya , sejujurnya aku ingin tertawa bahagia!
Buny SMS lagi. Dari Arya.
Monica . . . *mo' nika' denganku?* (p. 336)*

With this proposal from Arya, it means that Monica is finally able to find a man who loves her and proposes to her. This fairytale ending resolves all of Monica's problems and it is in the hands of a man that a woman's problems can be resolved. The ideology at play here is that a single woman can only be happy if she has a man who loves her and without

which it is impossible for her to find happiness. Yet, this ideology is without resistance as there is no discussion of whether Monica has to leave her career and becomes full time housewife. The segregation of the two groups of women as suggested in the previous text is self-deconstructing when the ending crosses the rigid boundary that is previously set concerning a single woman's happiness. There is a negotiation between the texts that allows happiness for a married *career* woman, even though the happiness for a single woman is still denied.

CONCLUSION

The text of single career woman in *Jodoh Monica* is constructed on the interplay of power relations in the sites of age and gender. The discourse on which age and gender hold the power and becomes a regime of truth is based on a patriarchal discourse. Age is given power to relay knowledge and truth that confirm a patriarchal ideology, which judges an unmarried career woman to be abnormal and blames her for her inability to get a man. A woman's fulfillment should be centered on a man and not on her career and her happiness is put in the hands of a man. She should stay passive until a man takes the initiative whether or not to give her that love which is believed to be the main source of her happiness. The patriarchal ideology that consistently underlies the text has put women in a subordinate position compared to men; that women are dependent on men for their happiness. In the case of a single career woman, it is a double subordination, as she is put in a position lower from that of other women who are married. The text of urban single career woman in this Indonesian chick lit seeks to conform rather than challenge the patriarchal ideology. The effort to negotiate is only reflected in the lost of virginity and the maintaining of career for the protagonist. The existence of other texts that offer a more daring alternative, such as equal position in the subject of sex, is quickly silenced and made to have no possible future. The motto '*Lajang Kota*' printed on the cover of the novel which is a modification of the motto of British chick lit 'being single and happy', serves as a signifier that signified the absence of happiness in being single.

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