“To Get Out from the Cage”: Transnational Indonesian Women’s Experiences of Sexual Surveillance

by

Alexandra Cecilia Lloyd
BA, University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2015

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Despite a heterogenous array of sexual identities and histories, increasingly conservative ideals around women’s sexualities have amplified the social and political surveillance of women in contemporary Indonesia. At the same time, Indonesia’s increasing global engagement in the 21st century has created new avenues for unmarried Indonesian women to travel overseas for educational and economic opportunities. Little is known about how transnational migration shapes dynamics around sexuality among women studying overseas, in particular, whether geographic and cultural distance from parents, kin and communities at home changes patterns of sexual surveillance.

Using data collected through qualitative ethnographic methodologies during fieldwork from April to July of 2017, this thesis describes the lived experiences of sexuality and surveillance among 16 unmarried Indonesian women living and studying in Melbourne, Australia. I focus on how women negotiate the challenges of sexual surveillance in the context of their mobility and the tactical opportunities for agency this mobility fosters.

Intensive surveillance from home remained central to how women experienced sexuality overseas. They continued to fear the social consequences of shame, stigma, and reputational harm that sexual transgression could provoke. However, women also explored novel opportunities afforded by their transnational positionality. They used a limited range of tactics, primarily variations of secrecy and compliance, to respond to powerful parental, social, and cultural expectations about women’s sexualities. This thesis highlights the challenges and contradictions that transnational women face when dealing with pervasive sexual surveillance from parents, community, cultural norms, religion, and the state, and their struggles to achieve a degree of sexual agency overseas.
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Chapter 1: Transnational Indonesian Women & the Challenges of Sexuality & Surveillance

1.1 Introduction: “It’s About the Fear of Judgment”

Sitting cross-legged with her hands neatly folded in her lap, Emma¹, age 32, tells me how her move to Melbourne clarified the extent to which gendered sexual expectations about propriety, virginity and marriage traveled with her when she left Indonesia to study overseas. Her choice to pursue international education and an independent career had subjected her to significant criticism and stigma, as it threatened her marriage prospects as an older woman, and she was seen as too “free spirited” to be (sexually) appropriate for an unmarried woman. Emma was anxious about the many secrets she kept from her mother, extended kin, and friends regarding her changing practices and perspectives overseas, specifically her sexual life and romantic relationships in Melbourne, and the pressures she felt to conform to the expectations of others. She said, “there is an internal conflict that I am still feeling right now about who I am back home and who I am right now.”

Emma feared how her family and community would view her mobility in terms of her sexuality. She feared judgment. She said that increased education, particularly in a foreign context, was viewed as a threat to women’s “marriageability” because it made them “intimidating to men.” Further, single women who went to “the West,” were seen as corruptible; others feared they could be contaminated by the perceived sexual liberalism of Western cultures. As such, studying overseas came with the potential for (sexual) reputational harm. For Emma, decisions and practices around sexuality required careful

¹ Pseudonyms are used, and minor demographic details have been altered to protect respondents’ anonymity.
management and concealment because of her fears of pervasive stigma and its social consequences. Emma described the challenges transnational women, like her, face as they navigate their shifting context and powerful cultural expectations from home:

As international student you are basically on your own, so you have more freedom, I would say [...] But for unmarried women to have sex with man—if you do that then, you know, you are no longer a virgin, so you are not worthy of being married anymore. So, having come from that culture and coming here and having a romantic relationship, it is really challenging…I feel like I am living a double life.

As Emma shows, the anonymity that education abroad can provide sometimes offered women new chances to explore their desires and interests in novel ways, as cultural and social values from their “host country” exposed them to new ideals and norms of sexuality which differed from those of their home communities (Meldrum et al. 2014; Johnston & Longhurst 2010). However, these experiences were fraught with challenges and contradictions, as women struggled to overcome their fears of stigma and shame and enact sexualities that opposed, to a limited extent, the often-violent regulation of sexuality at home.

During my fieldwork in Melbourne, Australia from April to July of 2017, I carried out extensive research with 16 unmarried, female Indonesian university students who echoed Emma’s concerns about the impact of expectations and surveillance around sexuality from home. The trials of navigating hardline parental, social, and political expectations and ideologies around women’s sexualities carried overseas, underscoring the complexities of mobility and sexuality for sojourning Indonesian daughters. Expectations and discourses of morality, sexual propriety, and gender conformity from home, and experiences of relative independence overseas, challenge how women navigate sexuality in the context of their mobility. Struggles with secrecy, voice, and
visibility, shown in Emma’s anxieties about revealing her sexual practices and perspectives, arose for many respondents regardless of sexual status or practices. This research focuses on how an increasingly itinerant generation of young, single Indonesian women navigate sexuality. It explores some of the ways women struggle with challenges of sexual stigma, shame, self-regulation, desire and choice in the context of their transnational mobility.

Indonesia offers an important contemporary case study for the impacts of increasingly conservative cultural and social values on transnational women’s sexualities. Conservative expectations around heteronormative sexuality dominate in Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim-majority nation. Morality is widely mobilized to regulate and discipline the presence and visibility of women’s sexualities in light of recent rises in political conservativism (Platt et al. 2018). The high sociocultural and ideological value of *female* virginity, as a form of “social capital” (Davies 2018:4), has shrouded sex and sexuality in secrecy, silence, shame and stigma (Platt et al. 2018; Bennett 2005a; Davies 2015; Robinson 2009). Respondents repeatedly spoke of sexuality as something that is “just not talked about” and referenced many of their own careful negotiations of secrecy and revelation to avoid the social consequences of judgment. This interview data, and substantial literature, support what I call the silencing of sexuality in Indonesia, which frames this research.

Contemporary scholarship has also described, however, Indonesian women’s covert resistance, transgression, and subversion of these forces as they navigate sexuality and femininity (Bennett 2005b; Jennaway 2002; Blackwood 2007). Such strategic negotiations allow women to enact a degree of agency and explore their own bodies and
desires, with or without actual sexual practice, while they maintain visible adherence to general principles of piety and morality. However, little is known about how transnational migration impacts the ways increasingly itinerant Indonesian women negotiate surveillance and agency in the context of sexuality.

In the context of transnationalism—or a social sphere characterized by cross-border connectivity and simultaneity (Dunn 2010)—women are exposed to new, often competing, ideals and expectations while they are simultaneously subjected to those from home through various communication channels (Walton-Roberts 2015). As “global flows force different sexual worlds into confrontation, dialogue and hybridity” (Weeks 2018:3) sexuality “is constantly being mapped and remapped across various cultural and social landscapes” (Johnston & Longhurst 2010:2). In this thesis, I attend to the ways gendered and sexualized norms, values, and expectations produce affective responses in the everyday lives of women across and between national boundaries. I explore some of the nuanced ways women map their sexualities as they navigate the challenges and complexities of their cross-border context.

The extent and nature of sexual surveillance and violent efforts to repress the presence and visibility of women’s sexualities in Indonesia endures and remains central to women overseas, who continue to fear the consequences of open sexual autonomy. Differences of shifting geographic and cultural context do alter mobile women’s practices, ideals, and perspectives, but their perceived freedoms are limited by the temporariness of their migratory context. Thus, women struggle to enact a degree of agency in repressive circumstances by carefully tinkering with resources available to them overseas. The primary goal of women’s strategies is to maintain productive sexual
reputations and social relationships at home and ensure a degree of harmony for their return to Indonesia.

1.2 Transnational Women and Sexuality

As Johnston and Longhurst (2010:3-18) note, “sexuality has a profound effect on the way people live in, and interact with, space and place. In turn, space and place affect people’s sexuality…space, place, and sex are inextricably linked and embedded with complex power relations at a variety of different spatial scales.” Contemporary Indonesia, with “ideological tentacles working to define appropriate sexuality” (Bennett & Davies 2015:12) in all sectors of social and political life, is an important locale for exploring the ways women craft and perform sexuality within and against repressive or disciplinary conditions. However, growing global engagement has created new avenues for women to travel abroad in pursuit of educational or economic opportunities (Nuraryo 2014) and led to unprecedented growth of the Indonesia diaspora (Ananta & Arifin 2014). Due to close geographic proximity and developing political and economic relationships between the two nations, Indonesian students are traveling to Australia in record numbers (Novera 2004; Nuraryo 2014; Chi 2018; Taylor 2018).

Australia is the primary destination for Indonesian students traveling overseas. It offers an opportunity to study how global processes and cultural practices can become embedded in personal experience. International students are uniquely exposed to the dynamics of globalization and a range of gender and sexual identity politics (Kim 2011); nonetheless, there is a gap in social sciences scholarship about how Indonesian international students experience and act around sexuality.
Sexuality, like transnationalism, challenges assumptions of the “local” and “global” because it can be “shaped by a larger number of processes implicated in globalization…and the disjunctive flow of meaning produced across sites” (Blackwood & Wieringa 2007:4). As a result, sexuality is malleable and constantly (re)configured through “histories of power and differentially married to changing particularities of ‘desire’” (Howe & Rigi 2009:298). Sexuality is contentious terrain. Because sexuality is a power-laden field that both travels with individuals and is mediated by transnationalism, it is necessary to interrogate the “complex power relations that congeal around sexuality and spatiality” (Johnston & Longhurst 2010:18). I focus on the ways women negotiate sociocultural expectations, values, and norms around sexuality as they are enacted in the cross-border context. Specifically, I describe how transnational sexual surveillance endures overseas and shapes the ways women experience and make meaning of sexuality. Further, I show that women struggle to enact a degree of sexual agency through a series of strategies and tactics which take advantage of their transnational positionality, despite the many impediments that work to restrict their sexual agency.

1.2.1 Driving Research Questions
This thesis asks how unmarried Indonesian women navigate sexuality while studying overseas. I ask:

1. How do sexual values and expectations from home impact women’s lives overseas and how are they enforced?
2. How do women respond to efforts by distanced kin and communities to manage their sexualities and lives from afar?
3. What are women’s experiences of sexuality and how are their practices and perspectives related to their mobility?

In the following section, I provide a brief background of sexual surveillance in Indonesia in order to frame my research and highlight the issues that women face as they make decisions about their sexual lives.

1.3 Unmarried Women and the Surveillance of Sexuality in Indonesia

Research on transnational women’s struggles for sexual rights and freedoms are vital due to the rise of repressive sexual regimes in many parts of the world. In the current #metoo era, we are seeing global shifts in awareness of structural conditions that continue to repress, regulate, and disempower women along a continuum of sexualized violence (Zarkov & Davis 2018). Tensions and inequalities at the junctures of sexuality and the social can result in women’s voices not being heard. Obstacles such as stigma and shame, and outright violence perpetrated against women, are powerful regulators of women’s sexualities, embedded in the social fabric of their sexual lives (Hirsch et al. 2012). Many argue that sexuality is one of the most fundamental aspects of personhood and human relationships (Bristow 1999; Weeks 2009). Thus, the silencing of women’s voices and experiences, far from isolated in conservative cultural contexts, can deny women’s rights to know themselves, express their desires, and control their own lives and bodies (Hélie 2012).

Sexual conservativism is growing in Indonesia, in part, as a backlash against increasing global connectivity and democratization, which has sparked a series of aggressive interventions centred on conservative moral claims about sexuality (Platt et al. 2018). These interventions disproportionately target women, youth, and Indonesia’s
LGBTQ+ community (Platt et al. 2018; Harding 2008; Utomo & McDonald 2008). For example, Indonesian media has attacked “sexual subcultures”—including dress, raves, rock music, public displays of affection and public sexual relationships—in order to enforce idealized sexual moralities (Parker 2008). Sexuality has been violently regulated by both state and society in Indonesia, with many recent examples receiving international attention. In Aceh, Indonesia’s only sharia-ruled province, a number of public canings of unmarried couples suspected of having sex (see Figure 1) or even being alone together have received international criticism (Juanda 2018). Similarly, in November 2017 residents forced their way into a private home in Banten and accused a young couple of having premarital sex (The Jakarta Post 2018). They assaulted the couple, forced them to strip naked, and paraded them in the streets while others filmed and photographed the event, and later shared their story widely online (Zakiah 2018). In January 2018, 12 trans women were arrested after a raid of salons in Aceh; they were shaved and forced to publicly don men’s clothes as part of their “coaching to become men” (Westcott & Andri 2018). And more recently, in April 2018, a teenage couple accused of being together alone were forced by neighbours to sit around a well while neighbours dumped raw sewage on them (Lamb 2018). These are just a few examples of the harsh realities of sexual surveillance in Indonesia. In each of these instances, public shaming is important to the broader social control of sexuality (see Figure 1).
Today, a legacy of linking women’s sexual propriety to the moral landscape of the nation persists and dominates prohibitive sexual discourses (Wee 2012; Platt et al. 2018). Increasing surveillance and regulation of sexuality in Indonesia has led to moves within the country, in recent months, to criminalize extramarital sex under adultery laws. In part an effort to eradicate homosexuality in the country, the changes could affect all Indonesians. If passed, unmarried women caught, or even suspected of, having sex may face years of imprisonment and public shame (Zakiah 2018). Because the bill establishes complaints of any “third party” as the legal basis for prosecution, it could pave the way to legalizing intensive public intervention in individual private lives in a country where vigilante citizens already frequently act as “moral police” (Wee 2012), beating, detaining, and otherwise publicly humiliating or shaming citizens (Zakiah 2018; Wahyuningroem 2014; Lamb 2018).
This thesis explores how fear is reinforced, instilled, and internalized by unmarried women exposed to these events and the politics and ideologies which led to them, which effectively regulate their behaviours even overseas. In Indonesia, unmarried women are at a formative time in their lives regarding the negotiation of sexuality, desire, parental expectations, and social norms and values (Bennett 2005a). In Indonesia, the “social construction of female identity is intimately linked with notions of purity and impurity…female sexuality is vigilantly policed before marriage to uphold the ideal of female purity” (2005a:24), forcing women to explore their desires, bodies, and identities against expectations of marriage and reproduction. Sociopolitical ideologies and ideals of female sexuality—in particular, virginity before heterosexual marriage and monogamy after—disproportionately impact single women, as public discourses suggest their possible sexual “deviance” poses a greater threat to the moral landscapes of the nation (Bennett 2005a, 2005b; Jennaway 2002; Parker 2008). Thus, single women’s sexualities and desires are often “muted” (Jennaway 2002:21) by their sociopolitical subordination in Indonesia. The cultural value of virginity, and imperatives of family honour, for example, prevent women’s access to sexual and reproductive health care, which remains, by law, available only to married women (Bennett 2015). This thesis asks if this pervasive sexual surveillance endures for women who leave to study overseas.

1.4 Tactics for Transcending Surveillance: Key Concepts and Framing

In order to address the challenges Indonesian women face when navigating sexuality in the transnational context, I draw on several key concepts, including sexuality, bodies, sexual surveillance, and agency.
Sexuality, in all its cultural, social, political, and historical complexity and central to this thesis, resists any singular definition (Aggleton & Parker 2010). For this research, I work from an understanding of sexuality as necessarily malleable, culturally and historically-situated, entangled in gender identity politics\(^2\), and central to individual identity. I define sexuality as embodied in but moving beyond partner choice and sexual practice. Sexuality is intimately interwoven with norms and expectations, religion, morality, danger, desire, and pleasure. Bristow (1997:1) defines sexuality as “both internal and external phenomena, both the realm of the psyche and the material world.”

Sexuality is shaped in affective responses to conditions of sexual propriety, acceptability, and normalcy produced by external power relations, such as social ideologies or legal frameworks (Foucault 1978; Bristow 1997). Individuals self-regulate their sexualities in accordance with social sexual norms (self-surveillance) (Foucault 1978). For respondents, external networks of family, community, religion, and society were frequently invoked in responses to sexuality, blurring the boundaries between public and private. Thus, sexuality is infused with power relations and subject to “the power of a surveillant gaze” (Johnston & Longhurst 2010:30; Foucault 1978; Davies 2015).

Often, sexuality is a negotiation of “danger and desire” (Bennett 2005a:4); it is lived experience, conscious and unconscious outcomes of social conditions and individual capacity to respond to those conditions. This perspective creates space to explore the multiplicity of sexuality—as personal, material, psychological, social, political—attentive to experiences of sexuality in flux (Moore 2012). This approach

\(^2\) Per Parker (2008): “in the Indonesian cultural context, sexuality cannot be seen as ‘plastic’, autonomous or free from the constraints of the sex/gender system. Sex and gender are almost inextricable.” While I recognize the fluidity of gender and sexuality, it is important that I do not overshadow respondent voices with my own.
allows me to “decenter normative notions of sexuality” (Johnston & Longhurst 2010:22), such as those communicated to Indonesian overseas students by their families and their communities and explore the different ways sexuality is experienced or embodied among transnational women. Sexuality is “both subjective and intersubjective, personal and relational” (Hoang & Yeoh 2015:592). This orientation is useful for understanding the role of social, political, and cultural institutions in the formation of sexuality among mobile women.

In Indonesia, the “foundation of sexual morality is heterosexual marriage…the desire to create children is upheld as the most legitimate motivation for sexual relations,” suggesting premarital sexual relations are “deviant and immoral” (Bennett 2015:149). Male sexuality is privileged, constructed as naturally aggressive or “hydraulic” (Robinson 2015), while female sexuality is “always condemned …should ideally be constrained, passive, and confined within marriage” (Bennett 2015:149) with consequences for unmarried women’s mental, social, and physical well-being. As Parker (2008) notes, idealized or normative sexuality and femininity in Indonesia exist within a “sacred triangle” of heterosexuality, reproduction, and marriage. Thus, a “culture of shame” (Bennett 2005a:31) shrouds unmarried women’s sexualities, who are subjected to aggressive surveillance and intervention in their romantic and sexual lives. Because women’s reputations are central to their sexual identity (Hirsch et al. 2012), visions of sexual stigma, social ostracism and isolation, or violence generate affective responses from women navigating sexuality.

A second concept important to transnational women’s experiences of sexuality is the body. Our bodies are “the source of our practical engagement with the world” (Hoang
& Yeoh 2015:592) and it is through our bodies that we live and experience sexuality. “It matters that bodies occupy particular positions marked in time and space” in the study of sexuality (Johnston & Longhurst 2010:2). The corporeal body also has social meaning; it is both the medium, and the product of social action (Joyce 2005). A focus on how women talk about their bodies (including the policing of their bodies) reveals a great deal about how they negotiate sexuality in the context of their mobility (Moore 2012), particularly because the body and its extending properties are central to gendered and sexualized specificities of social relationships. Because the “boundaries of the body and of the spatial context ‘around’ it are shown to be inextricably related” (Joyce 2005:149), understanding women’s bodily experiences is necessary to a focus on sexuality and mobility.

Borrowing substantially from the work of Sharyn Graham Davies (2015), I use the concept of sexual surveillance to frame my research and explore the disciplinary forces that work to regulate women’s sexualities. Broadly, surveillance involves the “systemic monitoring of people to regulate and govern their behaviour” through exercises of social or political power (2015:31). Building on a Foucauldian heritage, sexuality is open to various disciplinary measures of surveillance (Lemke 2011). Sexual surveillance involves the pervasive monitoring of people to govern their sexual and gendered behaviours and operates through moral ideologies, norms, shame and stigma, gossip and judgment, and even direct violence. Shame, in particular, is central to sexual surveillance and a “powerful regulator of sexuality in the archipelago” (Davies 2015:29). As Bennett (2005a:5) notes, “the threat of social violence through shame, stigma, gossip and the loss of sexual reputation exists for all women in Indonesia…because they are subject to some
degree of social surveillance.” Importantly for my research, surveillance operates at multiple levels, including parental monitoring and expectations, in online spaces and digital communications, on women’s physical bodies, and through larger social ideologies and norms, the violation of which results in reputational harm with significant social consequences like physical violence, social ostracism, dishonouring self and kin, and/or threatening marriageability.

Transnational Indonesian women, as they navigate sexuality, are caught in tensions between sexual surveillance and their own agency, or the relational “capacity for effective and meaningful action” in a given context (Robb 2010:515). I use sexual agency to refer specifically to “the ability to [act on or] make decisions and assertions related to one’s own sexuality” (Klein et al. 2018). Agency, like sexuality, is embedded in the confines and entanglements of norms, codes of conduct, intentions, moralities, and sociopolitical structures—it is always relational. As Ortner (2005:34) says, “agency refers to people (trying to) act on the world even as they are acted upon” by various social, cultural, political, and historical institutions, “not some natural or universal human quality, nor some essentialized free will.” As women navigate challenging and complex circumstances, they struggle to enact their agency in their daily lives overseas. Individual embeddedness in transnational contexts both facilitates and hinders choice, action, and effect and sheds light on the complexities of sexuality, surveillance and agency. Thus, I borrow from Wardlow’s idea of agency as “fenced in” (2006:73) stringent expectations and ideologies around sexuality and gender conformity. I frame agency as “fenced” in this research, as it emphasizes the boundaries and barriers that restrict and regulate choice and action for Indonesian “dependent daughters” (Bennett 2005a:22) overseas, whose
actions are both generated in, and constrained by, their transnational context (Bennett 2005a:22).

According to Bennett (2005b:103), single Indonesian women “can and do simultaneously support oppressive systems through their silence and public performance and subvert and transform the nature of those systems through private modes of resistance that remain largely invisible.” In the formation, deployment, and reconfiguration of sexuality, women are active in their responses to social, political, and ideological structures. Speaking to this, I highlight the ways women manipulate or strategically negotiate aspects of their lives, such as courtship, through a series of creative and flexible “tactics” (Guell 2012; de Certeau 1984). Tactics include “practices of social manipulation” such as “partial accommodation, selective resistance, cunning, and ways of ‘making do’ in difficult situations” (Dolson 2015:118). Women employ these tools and acts not as active resistance, but to “maneuver the workability” of their transnational context and tinker with possibilities for “making [their] lives habitable” (Guell 2012:52) in challenging, complex, and even exciting and rewarding circumstances.

Within Indonesia, scholars have described how unmarried women carve out space for “selective resistance” and “partial accommodation” through tactics such as pacaran backstreet, or secret dating (Dolson 2015:117; Bennett 2005b:103). Engaging in pacaran backstreet is just one way Indonesian women exercise considerable agency, often in resistance to hegemonic narratives of morality and sexual policing, even as their actions remain “fenced” within dynamic power relations which force secrecy. These actions are entangled in cultural values and expectations, and personal beliefs and desires. It is naïve to assume that transnational mobility is necessarily emancipatory, however. Instead, a
close attention to everyday experiences of mobile women helps us confront the presence of repressive structures across contexts. In this thesis, I highlight context-specific strategies designed and deployed by women to enact a degree of agency, even as they struggle against pervasive, often violent, sexual surveillance which restricts or fences their agency. Such tactics can take a variety of forms, as through dress and public behaviours, intentional practices of secrecy and disclosure, or manipulating online spaces and content. The goal of these careful negotiations is to garner and enact a degree of agency while also maintaining socially productive sexual reputations and relationships to home. Thus, agency also remains spatially and temporally fenced in the transnational context.

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 Transnational Women, Students, and Sexuality

According to Kim (2011:2) women’s growing participation in the global circuit of students is largely underestimated and under-researched, yet research with women studying overseas is important to understanding the “consequences of women’s transnational lives.” In her research with “diasporic daughters” from East Asia living and studying overseas, Kim (2010, 2011) found that in the imaginations of women, education represented an emancipatory force in which individualized lives would allow women to construct their own identities and achieve fulfillment, for example, in marriage and economic liberation (2010:31). Instead, regulative dimensions of gender and sociality continued to shape their lives and the opportunities available to them, contradicting expectations. Cultural differences were managed by attempts to recreate home in a foreign context through media-based communities founded on a form of “diasporic nationalism” (2011:97).
In similar work with female Indian international students in Canada, Walton-Roberts (2015) found the pursuit of education was not an individualized, autonomous decision, but negotiated in gendered family dynamics because overseas education was treated as a “social status consumption good” (2015:69). However, using constant digital connectivity, parents intensively monitored their daughters’ overseas lives to enforce moralities and demand women maintain their (sexual) “honour,” and their family’s, for their return to India. Sexuality and femininity were “policed in terms of controls over mobility, since if a woman moves freely in public space away from home it undermines community surveillance over and control of her sexuality” (2015:71). Women were challenged by strict surveillance from home and their mobility, where new hegemonic cultural values personified them as both foreign, and female, subject to racialized, heteronormative expectations while away.

Khoei et al. (2008) and Meldrum et al. (2014) both explore experiences of sexuality among female Muslim migrants living in Australia. Both projects found that women face challenges balancing their own culture, their religions, and Australian gender and sexual culture. Khoei et al. (2008) research with married Iranian women who migrated to Australia with their husbands and families, found that idealized Muslim femininity from home, focused on sexual obedience and its relationship to religious commitment, continued to be the primary factor shaping women’s sexualities overseas. However, they also found women also “re-formed the meanings of sexuality” overseas, where “it became an instrument, rather than merely a duty or tool for procreation” (2008:245). They conceptualised feminine sexuality as “a unique energy by which they could be empowered” in their sexual and marital lives (ibid.).
Similarly, Meldrum et al. (2014:167) found that young, transnational Muslim women “caught between two worlds” in Melbourne struggled with sexuality as they attempted to “live in two cultures, with the added influence of religion.” They found that women expressed different characteristics of their religious piety and their sexuality in the different spaces they occupied. According to Meldrum et al. (2014:176) respondents claimed a degree of sexual autonomy or “free will” in relation to their choices to express, or not express, their sexualities and conform to social norms and cultural or religious expectations in both contexts. They derived meaning and attitudes toward sexuality from both locations, though the maintenance of virginity was “unarguably a dominant morality” (2014:177) because of their fears of being judged by their families, friends, communities, and God. Although religious piety was “acknowledged as being important, many women expressed well-developed sexual independence in terms of their sexual priorities and attitudes” overseas (ibid.). In what follows, I build on this review by contextualizing Indonesian international student migration to Australia.

1.5.2 Indonesian Migration, International Students, and the Australian Context

Indonesian migration can be traced as far back as Dutch colonialism and Japanese occupation throughout WWII (Raharto 2007). Since the end of the Suharto regime in 1998, Indonesia has undergone dramatic political, social, and economic changes, including rapidly increasing international migration (Ananta & Arifin 2014). In the current era, Indonesian migration trends and research have been dominated by labour migration, as Indonesia represents one of the most important labour-exporting nations of Southeast Asia (Raharto 2007; Killias 2013). High numbers of Indonesian women traveling primarily to other areas of Southeast Asia and the Middle East to work as
domestic labourers are important to Indonesia’s domestic economy through remittances flows (Rudnyckyj 2004). At the same time, a growing population of Indonesians are migrating to pursue higher education and economic opportunities abroad. Growing international economic integration and increasing income and education of Indonesian citizens have led to rapid growth in emigration and settling abroad in the Netherlands, US and Australia (Ananta & Arifin 2014). The Indonesian diaspora is characterized largely by domestic labourers, primarily women, and the highly-skilled, such as students, and/or those marrying citizens of other countries such as Australia3 (Winarnita 2015; Ananta & Arifin 2014).

Australia is one of the largest providers of international education in the world (Novera 2004). International education is a major component of Australian GDP (Chi 2018), and at any given time, international students make up a large percentage of Australian visa-holders (Marginson 2015). In 2015, there were nearly 600,000 international students enrolled in higher education institutions across Australia (Deloitte Access Economics). Because of strong political and economic relationships between Indonesia and Australia, as well as close geographic proximity, Australia is the most popular destination for Indonesian students abroad (Novera 2004; Nuraryo 2014). In 2012, Indonesians “were the seventh largest group of international students in Australia” (Ananta & Arifin 2014:32). In 2015, Indonesian students comprised the third-largest international student community at the University of Melbourne alone, as one of Australia’s premier internationalized universities, hosting numerous Indonesian student

3 This growing trend is propagated by government seeking remittances flows to support the Indonesian economy by, primarily, women. This trend is “facilitated by the commercialisation of matchmaking agencies and internet access” (Ananta & Arifin 2014) in Indonesia.
organizations and support initiatives, such as scholarship programs (University of Melbourne). In 2012, nearly 12,000 Indonesian students held visas in Australia (Ananta & Arifin 2014:33), reflecting an important and increasing trend connecting the countries and framing this research.

Australia, as a patriarchal nation-state, has similar patterns to Indonesia of nuclear family composition, discriminatory policies, and insufficient, often exclusive, sexual education initiatives (Shannon 2016). Heteronormative gender and sexual norms within an ideological framework of Christianity remain the dominant cultural values in Australia, reflecting global trends not unique to non-Western contexts. Within Australia, research into discursive constructions of sexuality and their effects have focused on attitudes towards female sexuality’s impropriety by media, masculinity and nationalism (Kaladelfos 2012), and Australia’s history of discrimination against LGBTQ+ communities (Smaal 2012). Scholars suggest that historical practices and ideals permeate today’s sexual landscape, citing the eugenic movement’s influence in shaping current birth control campaigns for example (Carey 2012). However, in 2017, against decades of conservative resistance, Australia legalized gay marriage, sparking controversy and exaltation across the country (Cave & Williams 2017). Australian culture, defined as a “broad and diverse Western culture” (Meldrum et al. 2014), is known, specifically in its urban centres of Melbourne and Sydney, for diverse gender and sexual identity politics, which are particularly pronounced on university campuses.

There is little anthropological literature regarding sexual culture on campuses, as a unique social space for international students (Corkum 2015). However, because “sexuality and sexual practices are some of the most important and interesting areas
students navigate” (Bruce & Stewart 2010:1), international education represents a significant context for interrogating the relationship between sexuality and transnationalism. Campuses in Western countries are intensely social climates where liberal ideologies of gender and sexual identity, fluidity, and independence are often dominant; as such, student experiences can act as catalysts for exploring sexuality and identity (Smith 2009; Corkum 2015). Campuses are frequently associated with unique social and sexual scripts, such as those of “hook up culture,” yet little qualitative research explores student experiences of sexuality, especially for women from conservative cultural contexts who sojourn to countries like Australia (Garcia et al. 2012). How these domains impact and are navigated by international students from Indonesia provides rich information about how transnationalism mediates surveillance of sexuality in the current global era.

1.6 Chapter Summary and Thesis Outline

This thesis explores single Indonesian women’s experiences of surveillance and transnational migration in the context of sexuality. My research occurs in the tensions between pervasive sexual surveillance and women’s “fenced” agency, which they enact through a series of tactics which take advantage of their geographic positioning. The organization of chapters and themes reflects this push and pull.

In Chapter Two I outline my methodological approach. I outline my recruitment strategies and research protocol, the qualitative methods I employed to collect data during my fieldwork in Melbourne from April to July of 2017, and describe my process of data management and analysis. In closing, I attend to my positionality as researcher and speak to some of the challenges of “unsilencing” sexuality in this context before I summarize
my research respondents and situate them within their larger cultural, religious, and transnational contexts.

In Chapter Three I describe how parents, kin, and larger sociocultural structures in Indonesia seek to control transnational women and their sexualities through a focus on marital conventions and expectations. I argue that marriage is the dominant institution shaping the surveillance of single Indonesian women’s sexualities, as well as women’s personal experiences and perspectives of sexuality, even while they are overseas.

In Chapter Four I describe digital surveillance, as the primary means by which distanced communities monitor and (attempt to) regulate their daughters’ overseas lives. I focus, in part, on how sexual surveillance focuses on women’s bodies. I explore some of the tactics, specifically of dress and digital communications, women employ to manage and intercept surveillance and enact a degree of agency while overseas.

In Chapter Five I explore the ways women engage in, and make meaning of, dating and sexual practice while they are overseas. I describe how women speak of their experiences of sex, lust, desire, temptation, and dating and their relationship to surveillance and expectations from home. I argue that secrecy is both tactic, and imperative, to women’s sexual agency in this context.

Finally, in Chapter Six I summarize the main themes and arguments of this thesis. I offer my final conclusions, address the implications of this research, and reflect on some of its possible future directions.
Chapter 2: Research Methodologies & Overcoming the Silencing of Sexuality

2.1 Introduction: Unsilencing Sexuality in the Field

People will judge you. And a lot of girls are, actually, I don’t know—we never actually talk about sexuality. Like, from what I know, everyone is just virgins back home […] we are just supposed to assume that it doesn’t happen. (Shani, 21)

The increasingly conservative moral climate of Indonesia, disciplinary norms, and a culture of evasion and silence around sexuality together are powerful social mechanisms which repress the presence and visibility of female sexuality, as the above comment by Shani on silence and sexuality illustrates (Davies 2015; Platt et al. 2018). In this chapter, I explore this silence as it impacted my research fieldwork and methodologies. As Shani suggests, openly speaking of sex and sexuality in Indonesia is largely discouraged and profoundly stigmatized (e.g. Bennett 2005a; Jennaway 2002; Boellstorff 2005). The patriarchal silencing of women’s sexualities in Indonesia shaped my research process, as I was asking women to reflect on their experiences of sexual surveillance, sexuality, shame, and stigma. Thus, overcoming silence and creating the space for sexuality during data collection was one of my main research challenges.

This chapter addresses assumptions that cultural differences between researcher and informants can hinder communication in research on sexuality. Because I expected significant reticence from Indonesian respondents, it was important throughout the research process to allot extra time and effort towards building confidence and trust between participants and myself, creating the space to respectfully engage in dialogue about sensitive and secretive topics (Sprague 2016:160). As I will discuss in more detail, the combination of qualitative methods I employed, paired with fieldwork flexibility and spending extra time on relationship development with respondents, facilitated more
productive fieldwork relations and allowed me to grapple with the complexities inherent in *unsilencing* sexuality, a term I use here to describe creating space for cultural silences, rooted in intensive sexual surveillance, to become words.

In this chapter I describe my research design and the participation, practices, and problems of the various research methodologies I employed during my fieldwork in Melbourne, Australia from April to July of 2017. I outline my research protocol, recruitment strategies, and the participant eligibility requirements which informed this process. I then provide an overview of the ethnographic methods I used and explore why those methods were the most effective and appropriate for conducting research on sexuality, given the sensitivity of the subject. I dedicate a section of this chapter to discussing reflexivity and attending to my positionality within this research context, detailing some of the complexities surrounding sexuality and mobilities research. Finally, I outline data management and my analytic and interpretative approach, before closing with a basic characteristic summary of the 16 women who participated in this study.

### 2.2 Recruitment and Research Protocol

#### 2.2.1 Recruitment

Research was organized in order to establish and maintain a presence and relationships important to accessing my respondent community in Melbourne. I spent the early stages of fieldwork building contacts through academic activities and familiarizing myself with the city and student community. This included spending time on campuses and at public international student events. I then recruited 16 respondents over the course of my fieldwork. Given the sensitivity of sexuality, access was most effectively gained by mobilizing existing networks (Liamputtong 2007:49-50). Most respondents (n=12) were recruited through snowball sampling (Bernard 2006) or relationships with initial
community contacts (n=3), with only one response to a recruitment poster which I disseminated through an academic institution (Appendix 1). I followed up on initial expressions of interest by setting up introductory meetings with 15 of the respondents. At these meetings I described the intentions of the research, we set up interview dates, and we informally familiarized ourselves. Meetings were effective for reducing anxiety around the topic of sexuality and offered an opportunity to develop enough familiarity with initial respondents to facilitate snowball sampling (Liamputtong 2007:48-49; Billo & Hiemstra 2013). To seek out diverse networks of women across multiple institutions and ensure a higher degree of confidentiality and anonymity, I snowball sampled no more than two participants from each initial contact.

Given that sexuality is complex terrain, and with the highly regulated nature of sexuality in the Indonesian context, snowball sampling and informal “hanging out” (Liamputtong 2007:50) prior to scheduling interviews were effective for gaining rapport and creating affective relations between respondents and myself. In turn, this made it easier for them to talk to me about sexuality when the interviews began. In the next section, I describe the participant eligibility requirements which informed recruitment for this research.

2.2.2 Research Respondents and Eligibility

This research documents the voices of one main group: unmarried, female, Indonesian international students, aged over 18, who were registered full-time at post-secondary institutions within Melbourne or the greater Melbourne area. I chose to work with unmarried women because of the significance of this life-stage in terms of sexual surveillance and sexuality. Given the many nuances of individual sexuality, and the
breadth of possible sexual experiences, I privileged in-depth, one-on-one interactions over a longer time frame with a relatively small cohort of participants, as opposed to interviewing family members or community members. Given the close-knit nature of the Indonesian international student community in Melbourne, this approach helped to protect confidentiality and anonymity for women who, based on reviews of the literature prior to fieldwork, would likely have concerns about “being judged” by their families and communities for participating. I anticipated that the most important data about respondents’ sexual lives and experiences would come from the women themselves.

Eligibility for participation required sufficient English competency to allow respondents to fully understand the informed consent process and feel comfortable with the research design (Bernard 2006). Because respondents were all completing post-secondary degrees in English and had passed ESL exams, this was not an issue. Participation was open to all sexual identities and orientations; however, all respondents self-identified as heterosexual. In the following section, I outline my ethics protocol.

### 2.2.3 Research Protocol

I received ethics approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) in May of 2017 prior to contacting any respondents. Before interviews or observations, I gave each respondent a copy of the consent form (Appendix 2), which we reviewed in detail. We each kept a copy for our records. Participants were given time to ask questions or express concerns before starting the formal interviews. I obtained written and verbal consent from all respondents to audio record interviews (Liamputtong 2010). I followed the same ethics protocol in secondary interviews and prior to formal participant observation activities. By ensuring that respondents were fully informed about the design
and intentions of the project, by collecting verbal and written consent, and by outlining and providing record of my obligations as researcher, I attempted to reduce possible power imbalances between myself and respondents produced by the complexity and sensitivity of research on sexualities (Parker et al. 1999; Sprague 2016; Christians 2018).

Because of the challenges of unsilencing experiences rooted in potentially hostile social and political contexts shaped by conservative moralities (Davies 2015), ethical considerations of “doing no harm” were of paramount concern. I made considerable effort to ensure respondent well-being and anonymity, which respondents said was important to them. Making clear to participants that I was accountable to them and would protect their identities and participation in the research was ethically important to me, as researcher, and helped build the trust necessary to collect rich and substantial data (Christians 2018). In the next section I outline the methodologies I employed throughout fieldwork which were effective in practicing sensitive research.

2.3 Methodology

To locate the lived experiences of respondents within their larger transnational contexts, I engaged them in multiple collaborative research methodologies. I recorded and transcribed 29 interviews, collected over 63 hours. I supplemented interview data with formal participant observation activities with four key informants—Emma, Diah, Maya, and Agnes—as well as more informal “deep hanging out” (Geertz 1998) with remaining participants during recruitment, as I met with each woman for coffee prior to formal research activities. In what follows, I detail each of my primary research methodologies: in-depth interviews and participant observation.
2.3.1 In-depth Interviews

Research on sexuality is inherently personal, but interviews can provide a safe, non-judgmental space to have conversations about sexuality, which can be a relief for some, as Emma noted:

I am still aware of that social censorship and I think that’s why I chose not to tell anyone. Except you! And this recorder! I don't really have anyone to talk to about those parts of relationships with [...] You know what, it feels so nice to talk about this in the open! Especially with somebody who understands. (Emma, 32)

According to Parker et al. (1999:428), in-depth interviewing, “especially in the case of research on sexual experience,” is the most important qualitative method for collecting data about the many nuances of individual sexuality. Knowing this, I conducted in-depth interviews with all participants. I typically conducted two interviews per respondent, averaging about four hours of total interview time with each woman. I based interviews on a set of semi-structured and open-ended interview questions (Appendix 3). Questions transitioned from general themes, such as transnational mobility and experiences as international students, to questions which drew on experiences and practices of women around the domain of sexuality, such as those about marriage aspirations or perspectives on Australian sexual culture. Following a semi-structured interview guide allowed for flexibility in interviews, which meant that respondents often led the direction of conversation while still allowing me to collect consistent topical data across participants (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007).

I implemented an interactive and engaged approach in interviews, paying careful attention to body language, euphemisms, and other revelatory linguistic or behavioural patterns. These observations helped guide interview procedures and enhanced fieldnotes and interview transcriptions (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori 2018:676-677). This sensory
ethnographic approach (Pink 2009) included, for example, noting visible bodily responses such as blushing or fidgeting in response to particular subject matter. I also noted in transcriptions when participants verbally faltered, or when difficult words such as “sex,” “condom,” “lesbian,” or “fuck” were spoken almost inaudibly, demonstrating through hushed tones a degree of sensitivity, secrecy, or mild discomfort (ibid.). I alleviated tension in these lines of inquiry by being patient and responding sensitively to discomfort, emphasizing that it was okay for respondents to continue to share if they were comfortable, despite challenges with particular ideas or language.

Often, days, even weeks, transpired between interviews and relationships with participants were extended over longer timeframes. This allowed me to follow the ebb and flow of lives, including trips home, other travels, formations and terminations of romantic relationships, and three graduations. I also had two in-depth exchanges from across geographic borders, offering new perspectives about adjusting to life back in Indonesia. For logistical reasons, these interviews were conducted over the telephone. Otherwise, all interviews occurred at locations agreed upon by respondents and myself to take advantage of an atmosphere of familiarity; most interviews took place at a quiet location on campus.

Interviews involved intentional lead-in, with more comfortable material at the forefront to ease participants into the conversation and avoid immediate discomfort (Liamputtong 2007). However, because I fully disclosed research objectives during recruitment and collected informed consent prior to conducting interviews, I anticipated that the subject matter would not cause significant discomfort. Interviews were substantial and extensive, featuring an unexpectedly high degree of openness and
willingness to share. This resulted, in part, a reciprocal and supportive research relationship that highlighted our shared experiences (Manderson et al. 2006). Our common ground as unmarried women in the same life stage, albeit subject to differing degrees of scrutiny and intervention in our sexual lives, as well as shared experiences of overseas education, relationships, age, and dealing with parents with strong personalities grounded this reciprocity. My willingness to share my own stories allowed interviews to be more conversational, less strained by a formal interview structure, and flexible, which reduced discomfort caused by the subject matter for respondents (Billo & Hiemstra 2013). Respondents were also bold, courageous, and generous with their time and stories.

Additionally, our mutual interests in the experiences of the other spurred interesting dialogue that allowed us to overcome assumptions and biases we might have made about each other based on our different cultural and national backgrounds. As demonstrated by the excerpt from Emma at the start of this section, creating space in the room for talking about sexuality, even with walls built high and supported by violent moral policing (Platt et al. 2018), facilitated a degree of unsilencing and allowed some participants to speak to challenges, experiences, and perspectives that were normally left unspoken. Finally, by demonstrating sensitivity to different cultural configurations of sexual practice and beliefs in Indonesia during interviews I was able to more productively access and understand respondents’ insights (Parker et al. 1999:420).

For research with diasporic communities, methodological approaches need to account for mobile technologies and communications, as important places for understanding how identities are performed, articulated, conceived or managed in the transnational context (Kim 2011). Thus, I also asked respondents multiple interview
questions about their social media usage and digital communications during interviews, which often led to participants sharing their social media with me. Due to ethics protocols, I do not specify the social media activity of any specific individual but generalize and anonymize content relative to research themes.

2.3.2 Participant Observation

I supplemented interview data with in-depth participant observation over multiple occasions with four key informants. Participant observation activities ranged from traveling outside of the city for a day of hiking—including many hours of driving—including shopping, meals, and attending public events and festivals. I also went on informal participant observation outings with five other respondents over lunch. Further, I consider the recruitment coffee meetings I had with participants as additional, informal observation opportunities. Participant observation is an important qualitative research methodology because it is a conversation in which the researcher “wanders together with” respondents (Kyle 1996 in Liamputtong 2007:7). Immersing myself in women’s daily activities was important for uncovering some of the more nuanced ways sexuality is negotiated in the flow of daily lives and allowed me to situate respondents in their larger social contexts (Parker et al. 1999; Bratich 2018).

Observation sessions ranged from a couple of hours to full-day activities. They facilitated more relaxed, often revelatory, conversations as pressure was reduced by removing the audio recording device and some interview formality (Bernard 2006:368). Thus, combining methodologies was important for triangulating research results (Flick 2018; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Specifically, I used participant observation to triangulate aspects of embodied sexuality, including public dress and behaviors, attention
to/from men, informal and “natural” expressions of desires and hopes, and more. I also observed respondents’ social self-awareness, or behaviours around being judged and avoidance strategies—a major concern that I had noted in interviews—as they were enacted in public social spheres. This allowed me to speak more clearly to the ways women cope with transnational surveillance or highly judgmental cultural norms at home, which I address in detail in this thesis.

2.4 Analysis and Data Management

Given the power dynamics inherent in the analysis, reporting, and representing of data collected in the field, I was concerned about staying true to respondents’ perspectives, beliefs, and language. Thus, I approached analysis as an iterative process (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007:159-160), with analytic categories and themes developing, and redeveloping, throughout fieldwork and into data management. After I returned from Australia I compiled and organized all data collected during fieldwork; I transcribed the interviews, inputted the files into MaxQDA12 data analysis software, and subjected them to a rigorous coding process. I analyzed data through a combination of methods, including drawing out key phrases and emic terms from interviews during transcription, mind-mapping ideas, and working with the coding software to retrieve and reorganize content around major analytical themes. I then categorized excerpts into important thematic clusters, which I broke down into more detailed composite elements. All findings were triangulated with data from interviews, participant observation, fieldnotes, and secondary sources (Flick 2018). As data never results from neutral processes and is inevitably shaped by the researcher, in what follows I attend to my own positionality and situate myself in my research design and implementation. I attend to my
ethnographic approach, as well as some of the ways I may have influenced respondents as they engaged with the research.

2.5 Reflexivity and Negotiating Researcher Positionality in the Field

Qualitative ethnographic research on sensitive and personal matters such as experiences of sex and sexuality, particularly in contexts where sexuality is stigmatized and secretive, demands a critical, reflexive attention to researcher positionality. This is because I influenced, and continue to influence, the research agenda and because as researchers, we learn as much about ourselves as those that we work with (Ali 2015). While writing, I have tried to situate myself within the context of my research. I am attentive to how I conceptualized and implemented my project, the ways I established and honored relationships with participants, as well as how I gathered, organized and analyzed materials. Following, I attend more specifically to my positionality as researcher in the actual data-gathering stage and how that impacted fieldwork.

My interest in the field of mobilities and sexuality is multiple. It stems from my role as research assistant on Dr. Leslie Butt’s larger project, *Southeast Asian Women, Migration and Family in the Global Era*, which helped me to situate my interests in this geopolitical area. My own politics and ideologies regarding sexuality and gender informed the decision to explore and develop this research agenda. I believe the importance of sexualities research is substantiated by existing scholarship summarized above both in the transnational context and within Indonesia⁴, as well as the politics of the current #metoo era. I wanted to know if respondents felt strongly about gender and

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⁴ See for example Bennett 2005a; Davies 2015; Wee 2012; Weeks 2009; Johnston & Longhurst 2010; Bristow 1999
sexual identity politics and surveillance as well. While not experienced by all respondents, it was the case that for many, the opportunity to have their voices and experiences heard through this research was important to them.

Before I left for the field many people, including Indonesian scholars, community stakeholders, and academic experts, told me that the women I was hoping to work with would “never speak to [me]” because of Indonesian cultural norms and conventions around sex and sexuality. And yet, despite or maybe because of our differences, respondents were interested in the research, willing to participate, and generous with their time. In practice, I simply did not find the level of difference and reticence that was anticipated; I didn’t have to “overcome” differences to get to the data, but instead what proved most interesting about my research was what we created in the space between us, in the dialogue we shared. When respondents spoke about sexuality, they often reflected on the familial, cultural and religious values and ideals which shape their understandings of the subject, frequently contrasting their experiences to those they believed were more characteristic of the secular “West” or Australia. Westerners were perceived as more liberal, or more “open” regarding sexual practice and sexual knowledge. In some instances, Australia, as “the West,” offered new opportunities for living independently, or being “free” from judgment and surveillance. This can be noted, for example, in Kade’s (20) observation about accessing contraception:

You can get condoms and everything at university and stuff [in Australia], for free all the time, but in Indonesia there is none. Even if you go to the supermarket and you want to buy it, the seller would just look at you like 'uh' […] in Indonesia it’s less accessible and then you are going to be judged if you do get it.
In other instances, it was expected that sexual liberalism, even sexual impropriety, was the jurisdiction of Westerners. This revealed some assumptions about moral and ideological differences they expected or experienced in Australia. Kade continued:

So, with internet we have easy access to Western culture and [parents/society] think it’s bad […] Because they think that how they dress, how they have like, sex and stuff, how they view sex and porn, it’s very, very different from us so it’s a bad thing.

The assumptions many respondents made that I, as a “Western woman,” might have different values around gender and sexuality than their own played a role in the research process. For some, I was representative of a culture, and was asked to speak to “what it’s like in the West.” These questions ranged from “but sometimes you [Westerners] are not getting married as well, and you just live together, right?” to “is it true that in America if you are still a virgin then people will be like, ‘why you are still a virgin?’?” It is possible that these assumptions and cultural differences influenced participant responses. On the one hand, this might have opened the possibility for expressing opinions and sharing experiences; for others it might have led to withholding insights due to anxiety that I might judge their perspectives. While some participants were more open about sex and sexuality, others were warier, especially those that were abstinent. However, for many, this reticence often decreased significantly over the course of the research.

To mediate the impact of cultural differences and constructed dichotomies of East and West, it was important that I maintain a “culturally-sensitive knowledge of sexual beliefs and practices” (Parker et al. 1999:420) and a respect for cultural norms in Indonesia to deferentially engage respondents (Liamputtong 2010:91). I obtained this knowledge through months of literature review, and initial outreach activities in
Melbourne, and substantiated it with the real experiences of respondents over the course of my fieldwork. I believe respondents recognized that their insights were valued, meaningful, and taken seriously. I also believe this research may have been seen as an opportunity to experience something “new” in the transnational context, as exemplified by Edith’s (32) comment about the interviews: “I didn’t know that I would talk to you—that I would be some kind of research participant for a person from Canada! But yeah, it was like ‘okay, cool, I will give it a try’.”

Sexuality research across geopolitical and cultural boundaries demands recognition that the topic is sensitive and requires a cautious approach (Parker et al. 1999). I found it possible to overcome the challenges of research on sexuality in great part through experiences I had in common with respondents—particularly our gender, age, and relative positioning in life as post-secondary, transnational students, and as unmarried women. Power imbalances were reshaped by “the space we shared as women” in which we were able to “deconstruct borders” between researcher and respondent (Ali 2015:784). I was amazed by the willingness of respondents to share their stories with me, voluntarily confiding experiences they have largely kept secret from most others in their lives. For respondents, vocalizing concerns about gender inequality and/or public sexual transgressions is simply not a viable option, given the potential social consequences and hostility their voices might be met with. As Maya (24) described it:

**M:** Seeing that most females who are trailblazers get ostracized, it’s not really worth the journey to be that public […] Many females who study abroad, like me, feel the same way. There are a lot of people who want to become that first woman who speaks vocally about things that have been happening in Indonesia; we do have the desire to change the environment for women […] but with the current political situation, I don’t think any of us is up for that role.
A: Right, stepping into that spotlight.
M: Yeah, or that target range.

In a context where women do not usually have opportunities to be heard, Maya’s insights offer an important reminder of the immense responsibility and privilege of the outsider-researcher entrusted with respondent stories and experiences. Given the silencing of sexuality in Indonesia, the wealth of data I obtained is both a privilege and an obligation to be accountable to respondents, their voices, and the research. It also indicates that the methodologies and approaches employed were effective for inquiry into this subject matter.

2.6 Participant Overview

In this final section, I describe in table form the 16 women who participated in this research (Table 1). Respondents are between the ages of 18 and 34, unmarried, and registered full-time at post-secondary institutions in Melbourne; on average, respondents had been in Australia just over a year and a half, with actual dates ranging from 11 months to three years. All respondents ages 18-21 were undergraduate students while all respondents ages 24-34 were graduate students. Seven respondents were funded by parents or family, primarily those pursuing undergraduate degrees. Most graduate student respondents were funded by scholarship programs available from the Indonesian Ministry of Finance (LPDP) or the Australian government (Australia Awards). Participants are from a range of locations in Indonesia, with differing religious and ethnic backgrounds. Most respondents are from the island of Java (n=12), where about 57% of Indonesia’s population resides (World Population Review 2018). While Indonesian census indicates 88% of the population identify as Muslim (ibid.), respondents are not reflective of broader Indonesian population demographics, with several Christian and Catholic
participants, most of Chinese-Indonesian heritage. Most participants (n=11) expressed a strong connection to their faith, while few others articulated themselves as more “liberal” or non-religious. While religion is foundational to Indonesian social, cultural, and political life and was significant to respondents and their insights, in contradiction to what I expected to find, religion was not as significant as surveillance, experienced similarly across this otherwise diverse group of women.

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Prev. Independent Experience Abroad</th>
<th>Dated Prior to Melbourne</th>
<th>Relationship Status in Melbourne</th>
<th>Sexually Active⁵</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citra</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kade</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santi</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shani</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diah</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayu</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
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<td>Muslim</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhea</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
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<td>Christian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadya</td>
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<td>Christian</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukma</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondent list in Table 1 is intended to situate respondents relevant to larger contextual threads woven through this thesis. Respondent age and religion are important to consider in light of how they experience sexual surveillance, intensive parental expectations and intervention, and romantic relationships or sexuality. For most women, traveling to Melbourne was their first independent experience abroad and their first time

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⁵ Throughout this thesis, I use “sexually active,” “sexual intercourse,” and “sex” to specifically denote penetrative vaginal intercourse unless stated otherwise. I use “sexually active,” “sexual practices,” and “sexual relationships” when discussing respondents who were having sex.
living independently of kin. Only three respondents lived away from parents prior to moving to Melbourne, and only one respondent lived with kin relations in Australia. Most respondents traveled regularly between Indonesia and Australia. Finally, it is foundational to this thesis to situate women in the context of their dating and sexual experiences. This diverse set of respondents provides significant opportunity to explore the breadth of responses to issues around sexuality for transnational Indonesian women studying overseas.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have summarized my research design, qualitative research methodologies, and data management after fieldwork was completed. Additionally, I described my positionality as researcher, and the ontological and epistemological assumptions that influenced my research. I have described respondents in terms of their age, mobility, and sexual or romantic experiences to more fully develop the arguments I present in later chapters. As indicated above, all respondents recruited were unmarried, which has important implications for the ways they experience sexual expectations and surveillance from their families, communities, and the state. In the next chapter, I discuss the surveillance of female sexuality by focusing in-depth on the imperative of marriage as it withstands and is reconfigured in the transnational context.
Chapter 3: Marriage & the Sexual Surveillance of Sojourning Daughters

3.1 Introduction: “If the Seal is Broken, you Can’t Buy It”

Marriage is the nucleus of Indonesian social life and according to Platt (2017:2) “Indonesians enter into marriage at near universal levels.” Marriage remains critical to defining moral relationships and idealized visions of family (O’Shaughnessy 2009; Bennett & Davies 2015). Social and state intervention in marriages reinforces its significance to the moral and social landscape of Indonesia, as the main avenue by which women’s social status, economic participation and kinship relationships are determined and legitimized (Platt 2017). In Indonesia, social and political discourses of the respectable nuclear family are central to the hegemony of heteronormative marriage (O’Shaughnessy 2009). Additionally, marriages are primarily endogamic—they occur within the parameters of shared ethnicity, and most dominantly, shared religion, which is enshrined in Indonesian Marriage Law. Marriage is also central to socially legitimate sexuality. The “hegemonic inter-linking of marriage, heterosexuality and reproduction in Indonesia” remains a dominant value, and marks both the ideal, and the normative standard, to which women are held (Parker 2008:20; cf. Blackwood 2007; Boellstorff 2005).

State regulation of marriage in Indonesia is consolidated in the Marriage Law of 1974, which allows court-sanctioned polygamy only for men with multiple wives and requires marriages be based on a shared religion (O’Shaughnessy 2009:30). As both Platt (2017) and O’Shaughnessy (2009) note, the law uses gendered terminology to privilege male authority in marriage, referring to women as “managers of households” and men as “heads of households” (Platt 2017:10). Women’s abilities to fulfill “natural” roles as
mothers and wives are of high sociopolitical and ideological value and are key signifiers of women’s social identity and maturity (Parker 2008); marriage marks the point at which women enter into proper citizenship and adulthood as mothers and wives. Thus, women’s sexual agency is meant to be confined in marriage. However, this standard is complicated by the fact that women are marrying at later ages and are more likely to first pursue independent career opportunities, in part due to increasing access to higher education, including overseas (Jones & Yeung 2014). Historically, marriage has been a collective affair in which families and communities were largely involved in the orchestration of relationships and marriage unions (Platt 2017). While formal arranged marriage in Indonesia is increasingly uncommon, my research shows that the pervasiveness of various forms of surveillance and intervention by kin and social networks in daughters’ relationships remains common and promises a form of quasi-arranged marriage which persists today.

Indonesian society constructs female sexuality prior to marriage and motherhood as socially and sexually deviant (Bennett & Davies 2015). Given the value of female virginity, as a form of social capital (Davies 2018) for women, being unmarried represents a formative and unique time in women’s lives, as they are subjected to heightened surveillance by parents, kin, communities, and the public working to ensure their “virtue” and timely marriages (Bennett 2005a; Davies 2015). As Bennett (2005a:31) notes, a “culture of shame” surrounding women’s premarital sexuality is reinforced through inadequate sexual education, restricted access to reproductive health care, and discourses of the “desirable [nuclear] family,” thus legitimate or acceptable sexuality is isolated in marital and reproductive imperative. As such, Indonesian women’s “social and
sexual desires are constellated around matrimony” (Jennaway 2002:60) and their future aspirations necessarily enveloped within a desire to marry.

In this chapter, I document the significance and centrality of marriage in women’s personal understandings of womanhood and sexuality. I focus on women’s experiences of exhaustive marital expectations within the context of parental and social surveillance from home as they remained the dominant force shaping women’s sexualities overseas. I also explore how women spoke of marriage in relation to age, their transnational positionality, and sexuality more broadly. The overriding and prohibitive interlacing of marriage, heterosexuality, and reproduction remained the dominant value shaping both the surveillance of female sexuality, as well as women’s experiences of sexuality and femininity in Australia. Discourses of shame, stigma, and social persecution framed the connection between sexuality and marriage for women, thus their experiences of sexuality were primarily entangled in their aspirations and (in)abilities to fulfill expectations that they marry. These dominant prohibitive discourses were then re-circulated by respondents who feared the drastic consequences of violating sexual expectations. However, while most respondents aspired to marry and fulfill these expectations, women’s perspectives on their own possible marriages, suitors, and personal desires were sometimes reconfigured overseas.

Respondents often emphasized their commitment to and valuation of their independent educations and careers, shifting ideas about Indonesian women’s roles and lifeways from strictly marriage and reproduction. However, while being overseas might have offered temporary reprieve from the weight of social pressures and marriage precedents, this perceived “freedom” was ambivalent, and respondents always carried
these expectations with them. Pervasive surveillance, and the fear it instilled, continued
to dominate women’s experiences of sexuality. In this chapter, I review respondent
patterns of sexuality and their relationship to age, and focus on the centrality of marriage
to how women talk about sexuality. I describe the hardline, often abusive, expectations
that women face from parents and society to marry, especially as they age, and show the
conflict women experience in relation to their failures to fulfill these expectations as they
pursue higher education overseas. I describe how women, as overseas students, are seen
as violating conventions around ideal marriage, and how enduring surveillance from
home continues to shape sexuality.

3.1.1 Respondent Age and Patterns of Sexuality

In the summary of respondents presented in Chapter 2 (see Table 1), respondents
are organized first by age. A strong finding of this research is that younger participants
aged 18 to 21 were significantly less likely to have had serious romantic relationships
and/or sexual intercourse and felt less directly impacted by social and familial
expectations or pressure to marry. They were less likely to question gendered precedents
related to sexuality and marriage than older respondents (ages 24-34) and felt they were
temporarily free of such constraints given their age. For example, Victoria (18), like other
younger respondents, shared a story of a time she told her mother that “worst case
scenario,” she would never marry. She told me that her mother’s response was “you are
still young, you will find one” and reiterated to me that she was not concerned about
marriage and dating at this juncture in her life.

In contrast, older respondents verbalized that they felt immense pressure to marry
and have children. Marriage continuously framed their engagement with sexuality, their
families, and their larger social contexts. Of the 16 respondents, five had chosen to be sexually active while studying overseas. All but one of these women were over 28 years old. Four emphasized that they had been in established romantic relationships with the men they had sex with. For older respondents who had chosen to have sex, cultural expectations of marriage tangibly impacted the ways they understood and articulated their choices. For example, Edith (32) discussed her sexual decisions within the framework and confines of marriage:

> When you know that this is exactly the right person to be with, that’s it. Even though there is a contradiction inside me, because in Indonesian culture it’s not allowed to do that, to have sex before marriage.

As Edith illustrates, marital expectations fenced women’s sexual agency in this context. This was particularly true for older respondents who face significant pressure to marry as they age. In what follows, I describe how women centralize discourses of marriage and surveillance in their narratives of sexuality.

### 3.1.2 The Centrality of Marriage to Sexuality

For all respondents, interview responses about sexuality inevitably returned to marriage and the expectation that sex be contained within marriage. As such, emic definitions of sexuality that emerged throughout this research centralize marriage in any analysis of sexuality in this context. For respondents, decisions about sexual activity or abstinence were tied to cultural, social, and religious values and norms which silence sexuality outside of wedlock. Agnes (27) was very clear on this point: “I came here but I am still thinking that I don’t want to have sex before marriage. I think that’s already built within myself. Part of my culture, part of my belief.” Similarly, women echoed Indonesian cultural reticence around premarital sexuality in Indonesia by distancing
themselves from the subject, as with Lia (19) who said, “I personally do not know anyone that has sex before marriage, but I do know people who know. It’s a distant relationship.” The silencing of sexuality was further exemplified by Sarah (29): “having sex before marriage is not allowed […] though in practice people are still doing that, dating and have sex before marriage, but nobody knows about it.”

Indonesian prohibitions against premarital sex were key to how all respondents understood sexuality. They framed permissible sexuality, or what was “allowed,” in terms of larger expectations from kin, communities, society, law, and what they deemed “Indonesian culture.” Abstinence and sex within marriage were the most important expectations in single women’s lives, and there were severe social consequences for violating those expectations. As Santi (20) said, “not having sex before marriage or not having a child before marriage is very…they will judge you because of that, and I think that is the most important [expectation].” Women were expected to comply, as Diah (24) explained: “It’s not allowed to have sexual relationship before your marriage [in Indonesia].” Similarly, Agnes (27) said, “It’s part of the culture that, even from school they tell us like ‘no sex before marriage!’” As such, sexual surveillance in Indonesia is inextricable from marriage, and conversations about sexuality constantly returned to control, permission, and punishment. For example, Santi (20) contrasted women’s capacity for sexual agency in Australia with control and surveillance in Indonesia:

I feel that we are more responsible to ourselves [in Melbourne]. This is our body, this is our life, this is our decision that if I want to make sex or not, it’s our decision, so we have the responsibility to ourselves. But back in Indonesia, we don’t think about like, we are being responsible, but we fear the judgment, we fear the culture, or we fear our parents because we have to go home.
Women’s perspectives on sexuality within discourses of marriage were grounded in terms of external influences and interests, such as family pressures and social norms, over women’s personal desires and beliefs. They referred constantly to their families, churches, friends, and larger communities in conversations about premarital sexuality. Thus, sexual decisions were not personal, private, or autonomous, but heavily influenced by networks of constant, aggressive surveillance which isolated permissible sexuality in marriage:

Things like that are very confidential. My town is a very small town, so if you did something wrong the whole town will know. If you did sex before married, the whole town will know and the whole town will judge you and it’s very hard for you and your social life […] they will give a stamp on them, so we don’t share. You don’t tell if you are not a virgin. We hide it because it’s shameful. (Santi, 20)

To people there, to Indonesian people, they just think like, if you are not a virgin, then you are not good enough to become a wife. (Edith, 32)

Women echoed Santi and Edith’s narratives of stigma and shame, highlighting the imperative of shrouding sexuality in secrecy. Visions of sexual stigma as embodied or leaving a visual mark or “stamp,” as Santi said above, on women which allows shame to be weaponized against them were common for respondents who feared the social consequences of being categorized as “bad women.” One of the most common ways women talked about stigma, marriage and sexuality was through such discourses of “worthiness” or “goodness.” Emma (32), for example, echoed Edith’s insights, “if you are no longer a virgin, you are not worthy of being married anymore.” Further, the language women used to describe premarital sex included such phrases as “used good,” “tainted,” “whore,” and “bad woman.” Women often used objectifying terms in their
discussions of moralities. As Edith (32) continued from above, “it’s just like this: if the seal is broken, you can’t buy it, you know?”

Premarital sex was described in cultural terms as something shameful, something that violated established norms and values thus demanded secrecy. Public sexual transgressions were simply not a viable option for women, who were extremely cognizant of the social repercussions of being known, or even perceived, as sexually active outside of wedlock. As “dependent daughters” (Bennett 2005a:22) with limited sexual and social autonomy, and historically restricted mobility, women felt controlled by their parents and social stigma with limited options for resisting expectations that often manifested violently. Their lives, including their sexual lives, were vigilantly policed, thus their experiences of sexuality and of single womanhood more broadly were entangled in overwhelming pressures to marry. In the following section, I elaborate on the surveillance of sexuality through gendered marriage ideals and expectations from kin, embedded within larger social structures and normative frameworks.

3.2 Parental Pressure to Marry

Throughout conversations about sexuality and dating, respondents frequently referred to the marital expectations of their families, particularly their parents. Marriage was of paramount concern for families, and women experienced intense parental pressure and personal shame for being single, especially as they aged. All respondents were expected to marry, though they did not all say this in the same way. For parents, according to daughters, proper femininity (and sexuality), located in larger social and political discourses, is synonymous with “wife” and “mother.” Parental involvement and
intervention in women’s romantic lives is aggressive, and respondents expressed feeling this “pressure” even overseas. Emma (32), for example, said:

[Marriage] comes up a lot. Like last time I was home, the last messages when I was leaving was like, my mother kept saying ‘alright, make sure you find someone. Make sure you bring someone home next year.’

Similarly, Sukma (34) cited lessons she received from her own mother:

My mom told me that a good woman is the one who is obedient with her husband, who devotes her time to the family […] she kept reminding me that marriage is very important, it’s the highest achievement for a woman.

Because marriage is often seen as the “highest achievement” for women in Indonesia, most respondents felt, in some capacity, that their ability to procure a husband determined their value as individuals, both to their families and to society. In what follows, I show how these experiences were particularly correlated with women’s age.

### 3.2.1 Age and Parental Expectations

Overwhelmingly, the pressure to marry depended on a woman’s age. Younger respondents were aware of marital norms and expectations in their own lives and families, but most did not feel significant pressure. It was clear, however, that this would change as they aged:

My dad feels like, ‘nah, you can get married when you want to, when you think it’s right, but just not like, after 30.’ (Kade, 20)

Being raised as daughters, women always experienced parental expectations to marry, but they were asserted less explicitly for younger respondents. For example, Lia (19) explained, “they don’t really say it directly, but they have made it clear that they do want me to get married.” Similarly, Shani (21) said, “they’ll be like ‘oh my God, this guy is so handsome!’ Stuff like that […] but not really like, ‘oh you have to start thinking about
getting married.” Kade (20) continued from above, noting expectations that she follow an appropriate marital timeline:

> We never really talk about when you have to marry or have children. It’s mainly like, who you have to marry and what’s the time limit […] I think that’s because I am only 20 now, so my parents are like ‘just focus on university first.’

Despite respondents’ young ages, it was still the case that parents made their expectations that daughters marry within acceptable age-at-marriage boundaries clear. Additionally, parents still worked to intervene in young daughters’ romantic lives, as illustrated by Shani. For older respondents, parental pressure to marry was strong and direct. Women faced hardline, sometimes abusive, expectations from parents and families to marry; to be older than 30, particularly, and unmarried was shameful. Thus, respondents over 24 described significant intervention and expectation from their parents and kin:

> They have concerns with my age and with my relationship life […] I told my mom that my friends got engaged or that they would get married, or they were expecting a baby, and my parents say ‘When is your turn? Your time has come already!’ (Agnes, 27)

> My family mainly fears me getting stigma of like, old prune or old maid, things like that […] I am expected to get married before 30, I am expected to have kids. (Maya, 24)

As Agnes and Maya show, women experience significant pressure to marry while young, with 30 repeatedly mentioned as the absolute age boundary for marriage. Parental fears about daughters’ marriage prospects also centred on their perceived declining reproductive capacity. For example, Emma (32) noted that given her age, her mother

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6 Italics added to quotes throughout thesis to account for verbal emphasis of speaker.
“expected [her] to be in marriage life and having kids since 5 years ago.” Many older respondents internalized these pressures and felt ashamed or embarrassed that they were not meeting expectations. Agnes (27), for example, said she avoided talking about marriage with her family because she felt, as a 27-year-old Chinese-Indonesian, that she should already be married. This shame was often intensified for transnational women because their choice to study overseas was viewed as further delaying, or even threatening, marriage. Many respondents aspired to continue to study and/or advance their independent careers rather than marry. When they expressed these alternate desires, some were met with aggressive, even abusive, resistance from parents. Rhea (29) shared her experience:

I didn’t see myself as a person that would marry. I expressed that to my mom and she was really angry, saying like ‘why are you going to do that? You are going to be in Hell, God will hate you if you take that position’ […] I cannot really talk with my mom about those kinds of values, so it was really difficult for me dealing because as a Muslim woman, and the first daughter of the family, I know that my family has expectations of me […] yes, to get married, to be a pious wife […] Going back to Indonesia there was always this pressure, like my grandma asked, ‘why do you keep studying, shouldn’t you be getting married by now?’

While few reiterated such abusive language from parents, many spoke of the shame their singlehood brought to their families and the aggressive and constant efforts of parents to arbitrate their marital lives, even from afar, challenging women’s agency overseas.

3.2.2 Conflict and Intervention

Respondents’ desires and their parents’ expectations often conflicted. Women recognized, and resented, the gendered double standards of sexuality and marriage, and
the differing expectations they faced as women. Edith (32), for example, reiterated lessons she received from her mother:

My mom told me ‘never expect your men to be a virgin when you get married’ and I remember asking why […] I hear what she said, but deep inside my heart I felt like ‘why? Why do I have to accept things like that?’ […] women are not allowed to do that.

Respondents were often frustrated by the gendered and sexualized inequalities they faced in their own lives, contrasting their experiences to those of their male siblings, cousins, and neighbours. Such messages from kin reminded daughters of the explicit privileging of male sexuality in Indonesia, thus the stigma that disproportionately affects women if they do not marry or if they are seen as sexually inappropriate (Robinson 2015). As Agnes (27) describe it, “in our culture, you are wasting your time if you are woman and you are not getting married.” These lessons reinforced the pressure women felt to marry and dutifully adhere to expectations from kin and society, even when they conflicted with their personal desires. Rhea (29) felt that her personal values and aspirations were not aligned with her parents’. She saw marriage as a spectacle in which women are exhibited or “in front of everyone, being displayed.” She felt her opinions were in opposition to the standards of her mother and society at large, which located her worth in marriage.

Parents struggled to ensure that their daughters complied with their expectations, and worked to manage their daughters’ romantic lives, even from afar. Some respondents described their mother’s efforts to “set them up” with the sons of their mothers’ friends or to push them to date male neighbours during their visits home. Maya (24) referred to this as “the mommy network.” Involvement and intervention by kin, particularly mothers and “aunties,” often bordered on “arranging” their daughters’ marriages and relationships,
which women felt prevented their personal and sexual autonomy, even while they were overseas. Even when it seemed like daughters were allowed to choose their own partners, their parents’ strict expectations and surveillance restricted their agency. Every woman’s parents required she marry a man of the same religious background, and often the same ethnicity as well. This is reaffirmed by Indonesian marriage law, which requires state-sanctioned marriages to be between men and women of the same religion (O’Shaughnessy 2009). Victoria (18) referred to the marriage law in a conversation about how women make decisions about marriage:

You can’t marry someone who doesn’t have your religion, even though it’s love. I think that’s law in Indonesia, that someone will have to convert. I think that’s very complicated and causes social conflict and internal conflict among the family.

Maya (24), similarly, shared the story of her Indonesian roommate in Melbourne who had dated a man from a different ethnic and religious background. Because she had fallen in love with this man and wanted to marry him, they approached her parents to ask permission. According to Maya, however, there were:

Clashes between what she wants to do, who she wants to marry, and her family expectations, and who her culture expects her to marry, so she had to break up with the man of her dreams and now she is still single and she’s like, 33.

As these excerpts show, the surveillance of women’s sexualities and romantic lives permeates women’s experiences of desire, dating, expectations, and sexuality, even while they are overseas. Maya also references “cultural” expectations which conflicted with her roommate’s relationship. Women and their families were responding to larger social norms and ideals. For many, being single past certain age thresholds brought shame to both themselves and their families, reinforced by the social and community
networks in which they resided. This was consistent with a pattern of “kinships of shame” (Davies 2015) widespread in Indonesia, where social awareness of one’s personal behavior, including sexual practices, impacts how extended family are judged and treated. For example, when discussing marital expectations, Kade (20) said:

My grandmother says like, every birthday ‘hopefully you get a boyfriend soon and marry soon’ and I’m like, ‘yeah, okay.’ She’s scared that we are going to get old and nobody will want us, and it’s very frowned upon for females above 29 or 30 without boyfriends or husbands. It’s like, a shame to the family. She will feel ashamed, I feel like, if she talks to her friends. She wants to be proud of her family like, ‘yeah, my granddaughter just got married!’ or something, and if they find out she has a 30-year old granddaughter that hasn’t married, it’s just like…she will be ashamed.

Kade highlights the ways women are made responsible for their family’s honour, as well as their own, regarding marriage and sexuality. Santi (20) similarly admitted to “feeling bad for the parents” of Indonesian women who have premarital sex while overseas, because “society will judge [them] for that” and they would bring shame to their families. This extended form of shame and stigma, which goes beyond the parent/child relationship, is one reason for the intensive parental intervention and management of daughters’ romantic lives while overseas. The social expectation that women marry, and have sex solely within marriage, was often circulated through parents who sought to protect both their own and their daughters’ reputations, thus their social well-being. The surveillance and silencing of women’s sexuality within marriage, even in the context of kin networks, occurred within larger social and cultural prohibitions.

Following, I describe marriage expectations and sexual silencing from the larger social contexts in which respondents were embedded, demonstrating the extent and nature of sexual surveillance in Indonesia, and its implications for women’s agency in their transnational lives.
3.3 “They Will Judge You”: Community-level Sexual Surveillance

Respondents felt that the stigmatization of premarital sex, and pressure to marry, came not just from kin but from their larger social networks. As Kade (20) said, “even when you tell people you are not married yet at work, they will look at you like ‘really?’ so yeah, it’s not just family.” All respondents feared being “talked about” by their communities, both in Indonesia and the diaspora in Melbourne, which shaped their everyday practices. Respondents referenced “talk” frequently, both in the context of “they will talk” and “we can’t talk about,” which shows how surveillance silences sexuality in this context. As Agnes (27) said, “your neighbour or your community will know you are not married yet and you can be like, talked about. People will talk about you.” Women were anxious about the reputational consequences of non-marriage, as well as premarital sex. As Santi (20) described:

> It’s a woman thing. If they haven’t married by 24 or 25—or 29! They become so anxious and they are really desperate for it […] if you are 29 and you haven’t married people will question you.

Expectations to marry are heavily regulated by social standards and expectations, and specifically tied to “marriage age.” Further, women constantly referenced a broader “they.” In some references, “they” implied home communities and extended kin networks, but more frequently respondents used “they” to encapsulate the whole of Indonesian society, suggesting a broadly shared experience of surveillance and invasiveness that is widespread for women in Indonesia. In what follows, I explore women’s experiences of social sexual surveillance and marital stigma.
3.3.1 Social Surveillance, Singlehood and Sexuality

Respondents were deeply affected by anxieties about social stigma, marriage, and sexuality, especially those who were older and had reached or surpassed ideal “marriage age.” Santi (20) described social intervention in women’s marital lives, and its relationship to stigma, as they age:

I think it starts at like 20. They will ask like, ‘do you have a boyfriend? Why not?’ but they are just like, not as serious. But when you get to 22, 23, or even 24—maybe 24 or 25—they all ask like, more seriously […] because many people think that women should marry first, like put priority your marriage before your work or career […] and people judge. People still judge. Socially, not in my personal [opinion], but socially, marriage is something crucial.

Santi highlights women’s fears of judgment and reputational harm. Respondents overwhelmingly returned to “talk” or gossip, and the social consequences of being judged by neighbours, communities, and society. Maya (24) and Sukma (34) articulated this as they described wider social expectations of women:

[My family] know how deeply affected I [will be] by some sort of social ostracism if I ever get into that category when I am unmarried at the age of 35. There is this really big belief… like judgment—it’s not quite…I need a harsher word than judgment. So, if you are 35 and unmarried, if you are even 30 and unmarried, then you are definitely going to be facing some sort of like, censorship…censure, yeah! So, they don’t want me to experience that. (Maya, 24)

Even in this modern era, 34 is considered too old to be single, especially in Indonesia […] I will have a hard life back home if I am not married […] if they see me like this—single—no matter how successful I am in the future, and actually I am super happy, they will think otherwise. Like, ‘oh kasihan, kasihan’—kasihan means like, ‘oh, I pity her.’ (Sukma, 34)

Many women felt that their social worth was dictated by their ability to “achieve” marriage and, later, motherhood—seen as ideal femininity. Respondents told me that neighbours, community members, and even strangers in Indonesia will approach them
and ask about their marital status, often attempting to intervene in their lives. This invasiveness disturbed respondents. Sukma (34) continued:

> Over there, people find it easy to ask you like, ‘are you married? How old are you? You are 34? But why aren’t you married yet?’ kind of thing. Even though they are not my family, they are not my close friends. So, it’s like, what the hell?

As women age, they are subjected to increased surveillance and interference in their lives at the societal level. Images of the “old maid” circulated among women and substantiated their fears of stigmatization. This figure was frequently invoked, often in jokes, illustrating the extent to which this category was negatively stereotyped in Indonesian society and internalized in women’s anxieties about their reputations. They feared the detrimental effects their singlehood would have on their social positioning. For example, Emma (32) said:

> There is a lot of social prejudice against a so-called ‘old maid’ […] it’s like it’s their fault, and they scared the man away […] it’s whispers behind their backs, like, ‘oh, she is living alone, why didn’t she get married and what’s wrong with her?’ There is always this, you know, ‘what’s wrong with her that she isn’t married yet?’ There is always something ‘wrong’ with the woman if she doesn’t choose to get married.

Respondents used a range of expressions to emphasize the significance of being single in their cultural context: “abnormal,” “odd,” “incomplete,” “unworthy,” “unsuccessful,” “wrong,” “wrinkled old prune,” and other similar phrases were common and affected women’s self-understandings. As Nadya (34) said, “woman at my age, we are expected to be married already and if we are still single then sometimes people see us as abnormal or incomplete.” Throughout interviews, it was clear that blame for the “condition” (Maya, 24) of being single was disproportionately attributed to women, who
were viewed as “wrong” and subjected to pervasive stigma for failing to fulfill their
gendered social obligations.

The framing of sexuality as something understood only within marriage and
reproduction affirms larger social and cultural discourses of respectable women and
families. As suggested by Parker (2008), marriage, for women, is a sort of “rite of
passage” by which women are considered socially mature. Women who do not, or choose
not to, get married are highly stigmatized, which increases dramatically for women who
are suspected of having sex outside of wedlock. For example, Maya (24) once told me
that, as a medical student, she is “practical” about sex and sexuality, and did not believe
she should feel obliged to practice abstinence. She continued, however:

There is a value to coming to your marriage as a virgin. There is definitely
a value to having your hymen intact when you first have your relationship
as a wife and husband. Because, by then, your husband is not going to be
able to throw it in your face that you are a slut in every argument that
ensues in the marriage.

As in Maya’s case, expressions of disdain, solitude, or resentment did not equate
to outright resistance to expectations. All participants, albeit to differing degrees, wanted
to get married and the majority were adamantly abstinent. Instead, these expectations
were internalized by many respondents as shame. Agnes (27), for example, had wanted to
marry young and was actively looking for a partner at the time of our interviews. Her age,
single status, family pressure, and “culture’s” expectations that she marry had detrimental
impacts on her self-esteem, which I witnessed repeatedly during our time together. She
once told me, “I am looking for someone. Because I am already 27, man! Come on!”

Some respondents desired marriage but said they accepted being single, although it was
understood that it would not be acceptable to their families and larger social networks.
Thus, these statements were often contradicted in later conversations about returning home.

Marital expectations and the silencing surveillance of sexuality were not isolated in Indonesia but endured in Melbourne. Overseas education and marriage expectations often conflicted, and women’s families and communities often pushed back against their choice to study abroad instead of actively seeking out a partner, marrying, and reproducing. Higher education, particularly beyond the undergraduate level, was seen as detrimental to women’s marriage prospects or “marriageability,” and was often openly discouraged by women’s social networks. This conflicted with women’s personal desires and aspirations and restricted their agency in Melbourne. In the following section, I describe these tensions as respondents experienced them.

3.4 Marriage and Overseas Education

Cultural, social, and familial expectations of marriage and sexuality were important issues for women who chose to pursue advanced degrees overseas. Respondents reiterated stereotypes and sayings about women who pursue higher level education (in general), who are seen as threatening their marriage prospects by becoming “too educated” and “too independent” to be desirable to men or as “free spirits” subject to corruption or contamination by sexual liberalism in “the West” if they study overseas. Stigma surrounding women’s singlehood was sometimes more intense for women overseas, as their choice to study abroad was seen by others as further delaying marriage or even threatening their “marriageability” as men are “intimidated” by highly educated or independent women. Thus, transnational women feared that men might be “not brave” enough to marry them when they returned, and they would face significant social
hardship as a result. This experience was broadly shared by respondents, despite religious, ethnic, and age diversity. Sarah (29), for example, reiterated messages she received from her colleagues: “nobody will marry a woman with a PhD back in Indonesia.” Similarly, Sukma (34) said:

I remember from my grandma: ‘so you get home with a degree from an international university? Oh, but how about if people are afraid to approach you?’ […] For them, it’s a mistake. She is afraid that if I achieve things too high guys will be afraid to approach me […] because in marriage life, Indonesian men make sure that he is superior compared to his wife […] because they want control.

Stigma surrounding women’s advanced education or independence impacted respondents. Similar messages were repeatedly mentioned and framed women’s anxieties about marriage and their transnational positionality. Rhea (29) expressed frustration that her success would only be validated by marriage:

There are jokes about women who go to pursue higher degree—if you are going to chase after your masters you are probably going to come back to Indonesia with your mister as well. You know, like master and mister. It’s degrading […] I have been working and studying for my masters and they are only going to congratulate me if I have a Mr. as well?

Sukma (34), continuing from above, reiterated a conversation she had with her own mother where marriage similarly took precedence over her education:

‘I am very proud that you study abroad, and you are pursuing your master’s degree’ she said, ‘I am very happy…But I am happier if you are married.’ […] if you get married it suddenly means you have achieved something. No matter how successful you are, if you are still single, you are not successful.

Sukma’s mother, typical of Indonesian society in general, considers marriage to be the true mark of a woman’s success as compared to higher education (Bennett 2005a). Ayu (27) had received similar feedback from her male peers. She said, “if you go back to
Indonesia, there is like, no guy will marry you.” Respondents’ social networks promoted and perpetuated these perspectives to actively discourage women from pursuing education, or, alternatively, to encourage them to prioritize marriage over education. Women feared that their worth was defined by their singlehood; many felt shame or intense concern over the reputational, thus social, consequences of their struggles to be autonomous overseas, as their desires conflicted with their social obligations. While not explicitly about sex and sexuality, these expectations and discourses were more immediate and significant to women as they navigated their transnational lives. Sexual surveillance was largely embodied in the aggressive marital expectations and stigma women faced every day. Because of the silencing and confinement of sexuality within marriage, it was intimately interwoven in their experiences of sexuality overseas and remained the dominant narrative in women’s interview responses.

3.4.1 Marriage, Romance and Transnationalism

Expectations that women marry and reproduce were not curtailed by geographic distance. However, a minority of older respondents were, surprisingly, supported by their parents in their decision to study overseas provided they also find a man. Parents’ long-time concerns about their daughters’ singlehood were slightly alleviated when they went abroad because it was a new opportunity to find a suitable partner. This also eased expectations that women find strictly Indonesian men of their own ethnicity, though a shared religious background was still required. Parents also still expected daughters to return to Indonesia, even with foreign men. Maya (24) had not dated in Indonesia, as she focused on her education. Her family was concerned that she would not find a partner and
would face significant social stigma as she aged. Her family hoped she would find someone “more [her] caliber” in Australia:

They sort of just throw in the towel like, ‘oh, do whatever you want, and I expect you are going to be happier with someone who is more your caliber, and if you are going to Australia and if that culture seems to agree with you then fine, find a good Australian boy and bring him home to me.’

As in Maya’s case, transnationalism afforded some women a degree of choice and control within significant constraints. Her romantic or sexual life was still heavily policed and dictated by external parties, thus the temporariness of her migratory context and intensive transnational surveillance still fenced her sexual (or romantic) agency. Nadya (34), too, felt her parents supported her studies because they viewed it as an opportunity to find a suitor, given her age:

They were afraid that I wouldn’t be able to meet anyone, because they also expect me to marry at some point […] so they were quite happy when I decided to move to Australia because they know that I am not in Indonesia and there is a higher chance that I will meet someone, so they are quite open with that. And that openness, I think, comes with—because I am also getting older, so they are more like, ‘okay, whatever, just find someone!’

Parental resignation or enthusiasm about daughters finding men overseas was related to women’s age and reduced “desirability” in Indonesia. This harmed women’s self-image and hindered their sexual agency. Sukma (34), despite feeling “more free” in Melbourne and wanting to settle there, felt resigned to the fact that she would have to return home in a year. She was anxious about her age-upon-return and single status. She explained:

If I don’t have a serious relationship I will have a really hard time when I get back to Indo, I should say, because people keep asking like, ‘why aren’t you in a relationship? […] So, maybe in the next few months until the end of my study time here I can find one person that fits me.
While being overseas might have offered temporary reprieve from the weight of social pressures and marriage precedents, this perceived “freedom” was ambivalent, as women carried these expectations with them overseas. The stories of Sukma and others attach age, marriage expectations, parents, the social, education, and the transnational to women’s personal experiences of sexuality and femininity in Melbourne. While women drew on discourses of “proper” femininity, marriage imperative, and stigma surrounding their choices, their decisions to study overseas can be seen as transgressing established expectations or as opportunities for limited freedoms within highly structured conditions (fenced agency). However, women’s concerns about marriage and their social and sexual reputations dominated their experiences, and they struggled to juggle their desires or aspirations and preserving productive and harmonious relationships to home.

Increasing conservativism surrounding sexuality and gender in Indonesia is blurring the boundaries between public and private, or individual and collective (Davies 2015), even for women who are living away from home for extended periods of time. Social and political discourses of sexual morality are prohibitive, particularly for unmarried women, and Indonesian collectivity is implicated in individual sexual identity politics and practices (Bennett & Davies 2015). The women involved in this research are at a formative time in their lives, as “dependent daughters” with limited social autonomy and restricted mobility (Bennett 2005a:22). They are subject to intensive monitoring and intervention in their personal and romantic lives by kin and community, inundated with parental and social demands that they marry and the weight of ideologies which link their sexualities to the moral landscape of the nation (Platt et al. 2018; Wee 2012). As such, “shame is a key regulatory mechanism” operating to control and discipline single
women’s sexualities in Indonesia (Bennett & Davies 2015:13) because reputation is central to social well-being and sexual identity (Hirsch et al. 2012). Anxieties about shame, social ostracism, family honor, marriage prospects, and conflicting desires or aspirations were integral to how women spoke of, and made decisions about, sex and dating and fundamentally altered the ways women negotiated their sexual lives overseas (Bennett 2005a; Davies 2015).

3.5 Conclusion

I have argued that experiences, perspectives, and expectations of Indonesian overseas students’ sexuality are negotiated within the framework of marriage as it is defined and understood in Indonesia. As the main avenue by which women secure social maturity and legitimacy, and the ideal of femininity to which women are held, marriage is central to sexuality for women even as they sojourn overseas. Marriage remained the most pressing social, familial, and personal expectation shaping women’s sexual lives (Platt et al. 2018; Davies 2015; Bennett 2005a). To say, however, that alignment between women’s personal aspirations and the social obligation to marry reflects “conformity” to expectations flattens women’s lived experiences and ambitions. Their choices are substantially restrained by conflicting experiences of desire for relief from surveillance and the threat of stigma, being dutiful daughters, and pursuing their own aspirations, such as education. Interview data also suggests that marriage expectations, while enforced on all women throughout their lifespan, are experienced and enforced differently, dependent on a woman’s age. Overseas, women struggle to respond to norms from Indonesia which demand they marry or face significant social consequences in the form of stigma, shame, and social ostracism. Further, discourses which isolate permissible sexuality within
matrimony, the repercussions of shame, and interventionist attitudes of their extended social networks challenged women’s sexual agency.

Threats to unmarried women’s reputations are among the most powerful regulators of their decisions around, and experiences of, sexuality. Women were significantly muted by the numbingly repetitive expectations of their families, communities, and society at large, and as a result they often end up self-regulating. Fear of judgment and the repercussions of not fulfilling social obligations to marry was a powerful regulatory force which shaped how women envisioned their sexual selves and futures, articulated their relationship and marriage aspirations, and confronted gender inequalities in their own lives. While respondents desired marriage, they also desired social legitimacy, freedom from social persecution, and sexual autonomy if marriage was not actualized. Women do not talk about sexuality without talking about marriage, thus marriage and marital expectations were the most central aspect of women’s sexualities in this context.

In the next chapter, I transition from a focus on sexual surveillance to highlight the tactics by which women work to enact agency while overseas. I first describe how dress and women’s public behaviours are seen, socially, to embody and reflect women’s sexual propriety and how, in the context of transnationalism, surveillance is refracted through digital communications. I focus on aspects of dress and the digital to explore some of the nuanced ways women manipulate their visibility in order to negotiate transnational surveillance, the fear of judgment or stigma, and aggressive distanced intervention in their lives by kin and communities.
Chapter 4: Dress, the Digital, & Daughters Negotiating Transnational Surveillance

4.1 Introduction: “I Have Different Clothes for Australia and Indonesia”

In Indonesia, sexual surveillance often materializes in and around women’s physical bodies. While the previous chapter described the surveillance of sexuality through moral ideologies and discourses centring on marriage, this chapter explores how pervasive surveillance of women’s sexualities occurs through moral discourses and policing fixed on their bodies. Women’s physical appearances and public behaviours are commonly treated as matters open for public discussion and scrutiny (Platt et al. 2018). Davies (2018:12) refers to this focus on the body as “bio-borders,” or “buffer zones where state/religious/familial control is played out” that “mark women as morally connected relational beings.” Davies talks about virginity as a form of social capital (2018:4) which is often assessed through aspects of women’s bodily practice, such as the “pretty imperative” (beauty standards), or pious dress, which are seen to embody a woman’s sexual status as a virgin. In Indonesia, national and social moralizing projects, working to define and cement patriarchal gender roles and social order, strictly regulate women’s physical bodies and public visibility, promoting a sexual propriety that is “measured through purity, piety, and prettiness” (Davies 2018:3). In other words, what you wear and how you look can determine how you are perceived sexually in social contexts. As such, women (are expected to) dedicate significant effort to maintaining bodily ideals, in which the visibility of their physical appearances marks their sexual propriety and “goodness” (Jones 2010; Wee 2012).

While Indonesian dress varies by region, women’s bodies are violently policed in public spaces across the country. For example, in “veiling raids” various vigilante groups
“claiming to represent society’s moral force” have been known to tear off women’s veils if “too stylish” or cut their pants if “too tight” (Wee 2012:36). Women’s dress is invoked in discourses about sexual impropriety and blamed in instances of sexual violence. For example, after the gang rape of an Acehnese woman suspected of having sex with a married man in 2014, the head of the municipal Sharia division said, “according to people here, she often dresses sexy and seductive to men. Perhaps when she was caught she bribed them by letting them grab her body” (Wahyuningroem 2014). Because sexual propriety is seen as interpretable from the public presentation of women’s bodies, including dress and their public behaviours, they are subject to intensive surveillance that restricts their mobility and sexual agency. Dress and adornment can, consequently, encode power dynamics and reconfigure or mediate social relationships.

Transnationally, the surveillance of “diasporic daughters” (Kim 2011) takes place primarily through digital communications\(^7\), and this surveillance often focuses on women’s dress and public behaviours as they are made visible on social media. Thus, this chapter also explores how online spaces play a role in furthering moralities in which women’s bodies are judged and regulated, as digital surveillance blurs lines between individual and collective, public and private, and home and away (Madianou & Miller 2012). In the context of daughters’ overseas mobility, family and community dynamics are maintained through online platforms (Kim 2010). Madianou (2016:183) refers to this as “ambient co-presence,” where “the peripheral, yet intense awareness of distant others [is] made possible through the affordances of ubiquitous media environments.” She

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\(^7\) Indonesians are among Asia’s top users of mobile phones, internet and social media apps, with 62 million active Facebook users and over 40% of the population using WhatsApp daily (Statista 2017).
argues that the “always on culture” of polymedia⁸ reduces the gap between geographically-distanced parties, providing space for both surveillance and social support in the transnational context. Women’s overseas mobility can also undermine this surveillance through digital means. Online spaces become new avenues for living out a relational identity, including documenting a visible image of self to others and otherwise controlling the content of communications.

This chapter addresses the relationship between dress, digital communications, sexuality and surveillance. I focus on how women navigate tensions between the challenges of sexual surveillance and gendered expectations and their own agency overseas. I describe some of the material means and tactics women strategically engage to enact their agency overseas. These tactics are flexible and creative tools women employ to manage surveillance and garner a sense of control of their lives in complex and challenging circumstances (Guell 2012:519). I focus on two related areas of material practice: polymedia and dress, by which I mean clothing, ornamentation, and the aesthetics of physical appearance. I discuss the ways women manage and manipulate aspects of dress and media to enact agency and limit the presence and power of surveillance in their lives overseas. First, I briefly document women’s experiences of bodily sexual surveillance in Indonesia. I then describe their dress practices in Melbourne to illustrate how they attempt to subvert surveillance and carve out space for their own agency. The second half of this chapter addresses the digital surveillance of sojourning

⁸ Polymedia is “an emerging environment of communicative opportunities that functions as an ‘integrated structure’ within which each individual medium is defined in relational terms in the context of all other media.” (Madianou & Miller 2012:170).
daughters before detailing the ways they manipulate their online media presence and communications to intercept surveillance from afar.

Overseas, women are more able to strategically negotiate surveillance through dress and social media. Women work to enact a degree of agency, and act against repressive norms and restrictions, through various tactics available to them abroad. While many were pushing the permissible boundaries, to an extent, they were also carefully managing the visibility of these transgressions through digital means to feign an adherence to strict expectations and maintain productive relationships and reputations at home. Thus, while women participated in transnational social worlds in a way that advanced their personal agency through these material means, their agency remained fenced by their circumstances and the necessary (in)visibility of their practices.

4.2 Surveillance and Women’s Tactical Negotiations of Dress and the Body

Dress systems and prescribed codes of conduct are inextricable from political and social relations of power (Sassatelli 2012; Jones 2003). In Indonesia, according to respondents, exposed or inadequately adorned (female) bodies are deemed socially and culturally inappropriate and suggest that the person under the clothing is immoral, improper, or abnormal. These inferences are particularly related to sexual propriety. Tactics “of fashioning the body are a visible and primary denotive form of acculturation…we wear our bodies to present ourselves to our social environment, mapping out our codes of conduct through our fashioning behaviours” (Craik 1993:4). Further, “the shame frontier is especially elaborated for women” and their bodies, subject to “the gaze” of kin, communities, men, and the Indonesian state (Craik 1993:11). However, dress is not just a pragmatic response to obligations, but a means for women to
live and express their self-identities. Dress, and media more broadly, are spaces where “expression and existence merge” (Peters 2015:15). The following sections show how tactics of dress are one means by which women embody and execute their sexual and personal agency overseas.

4.2.1 “Their Eyes Say Everything”: Sexual Surveillance of Women’s Bodies

Respondents consistently invoked dress and women’s bodies in conversations about sexuality, moral ideologies and expectations, and the consequences of judgment and stigma. For example, Kade (20), when reflecting on the relationship of dress to Indonesian cultural and social values, described being taught in school to avoid “provocative” clothing. Similarly, echoing narratives of victim-blaming for sexual violence mentioned above, Lia (19) described a test she took in high school that claimed women should prevent rape by “wearing modest clothing.” Respondents repeatedly referenced similar lessons they received from family, peers, and neighbours. Lia (19) continued to describe the challenges women face navigating moral discourses of “good” and “bad” women centred on their bodies. She said, “good women are pretty—they make an effort. But bad women are seen as the ones who maybe don’t put any effort at all or put too much effort.” Similarly, Sukma (34) said, “bad women, of course, are the ones who go out with their friends all the time, spent a lot of money on clothing, wear too much makeup, wear nail colours. If the colour is too bright, they will consider you as a whore.” Women who stand out are accused of immodesty or impropriety, yet “good women” are still expected to aestheticize themselves to fulfil the “pretty imperative” (Davies 2018:4). As Kade (20) said, “it’s like, how are we supposed to dress? One people want us to do this, but another wants us to do that.” The moral paradox of prettiness and
modesty required that women wear clothing carefully to appear compliant with a larger set of sexual imperatives.

As Lia, Sukma, and Kade’s insights show, discourses of “good” and “bad” women circulated around women’s dress, beauty and public behaviours. These categories, referenced repeatedly by respondents, are fixed in larger Indonesian sexual discourses that reduce individual women to categorical stereotypes and hinder their agency (Wahyuningroem 2014). As Emma (32) said, “you cannot wear clothes that are too open or too sexy, because they will have negative opinions about you […] if you are dressing promiscuously, you are not a good woman.” Victoria (18), similarly, said “in Indonesia, you can sort of put into conclusion that seeing someone dressed in like, shorts, means ‘oh, that girl is bad.’ They want to judge her […] everything that is revealing is haram and people will judge you.” Haram refers to things forbidden by Islamic law.

Edith (32), too, said, “if you are wearing short skirts it’s the same. Even the guys will whistle at you. You are just being judged as a slut, you know? They just judge you by your appearance.” Respondents echoed these narratives in their responses and commented on how they carefully navigate these distinctions to avoid being “talked about” or judged by others. Respondents felt they were constantly monitored in public spaces in Indonesia, and as such were always managing this gaze and their bodies. As Ayu (27) explained, “much of society will talk about her, so it influences the way she does something.” Similarly, Victoria (18) shared her own experience:

This one time I was wearing shorts at the mall and this girl behind me was like ‘mom, mom that girl in front of me she wears really short shorts’ […] and I was like ‘these aren’t even short!’ Like, I already got judged. So, people basically judge you, what you wear […] they will really look at you in a way that’s like, I know they are judging me just by looking. Their eyes say everything.
Many respondents said they dressed to fulfill expectations and avoid stigma or judgment instead of wearing what they wanted to. This was also tied to bodily behavior, such as laughing, but not too hard, riding female-specific motorbikes and only in seated positions which disguised their backsides or standing and sitting measured distances from male peers so as not to be deemed inappropriate. When women’s appearances or public behaviors are seen as “suggestive” or “immodest,” they are often also judged as “non-virgins” and “bad women.” This scrutiny and judgment does not extend to men in the same capacity. These double standards frustrated respondents, who feared such sexual interpretations and the reputational harm they could face. Kade (20) for example, said:

> You don’t really view men going out partying or to club as a bad thing, it’s just how they work, it’s just how they are in Indonesia, I think. Whereas girls it’s more like ‘oh my God, she is bad, she is wild’ […] when people know you go to clubs in Indonesia they are going to say that you are not like, a virgin […] I remember one time I told my parents that one of my friends was having her birthday in the club and they were like ‘oh my God, she is not a virgin anymore.’

The conformity required to protect their sexual reputations challenged women’s agency. In describing their experiences, respondents used such language as “unfair,” “bullshit,” “wrong,” “it’s different for like, my brother,” “patriarchy,” “the one who is blamed is the woman,” and “a ‘good girl’ has to be obedient” using fingers to indicate air quotes and cynicism. Expectations of dress, and the social regulation of bodies, disproportionately targeted women. Edith (32) grew frustrated during one interview as she touched on these inequalities:

> What I can sense is that women are always the ones being judged, you know? Which is again, unfair. It’s just a burden for the women! […] like, if we are wearing short skirts. Here it may be okay, where we are free to express ourselves, even if you want to wear a bikini, if you are daring
enough that is okay. But in Indonesia, if you are wearing short skirts people like, judge you and guys will whistle at you.

Edith was sexually harassed by men on a number of occasions and told me at length about a time where her professional attire for work—specifically, her long pencil skirt—exposed her to significant, unwanted physical attention from men that she felt violated her body, personal space, and safety. In similar responses, respondents repeatedly contrasted their experiences of judgment and surveillance in Indonesia with their perceptions of “freedom” in Melbourne:

What I see is like, we don’t judge people, we don’t judge girls as good or not in Australia. Because we don’t know those women closely, so we don’t have a right to judge them. But back in Indonesia, it’s like we have the right to judge every person […] like a girl who dress like, in a mini dress, who passes by in front of us […] they will say this girl is not good just based on her appearance. (Ayu, 27)

The surveillance of women’s bodies is embedded in notions of sexual morality and propriety. The legibility of women’s sexualities are marked on their bodies through their dress, beauty, and public practices, which all depend on their visibility. Women’s primary concern around dress and their bodies was about being judged as a “non-virgin” or “bad woman” and the violent social consequences of sexual stigma and shame. Thus, women carefully curate their attire and appearance to meet the expectations and ideals of intrusive others. However, geographic distance was experienced as temporary reprieve, and women felt more secure and less publicly scrutinized in Melbourne. In what follows, I describe how this perceived freedom, while ambivalent and limited, altered the ways women negotiated their personal choices and their public personas. “Free,” in Melbourne, from a judgment that was entangled in notions of sexuality and propriety, women were enacting their sexual agency through dress.
4.2.2 Women, Agency and Attire

Respondents described Melbourne as “more free” and “safer” than Indonesia, and felt the city supported their self-expression and fashion choices. They felt less confined by the limitations of sexual morality and less publicly scrutinized or monitored. Emma (32) claimed that in Melbourne “you can just be. Be yourself. Wear whatever you want and say whatever you want […] I have more freedom to be who I am without being judged by people.” Edith (32), too, spoke of the “freedom” she had in Melbourne to express herself. She described feeling more confident in her body and wearing clothes that she wanted to. She related her experiences to those of a group of her friends, other female Indonesian international students who were dressing differently in Melbourne:

They feel more comfort [in Melbourne]. And if people in Indonesia saw them like that, they would just be like ‘okay, that’s not good, that’s not right’ but here, they have that total freedom to express themselves.

Some respondents returned to discourses of “good” and “bad” women as they described their changing practices and ideals in an effort to reclaim and destabilize the stereotypes. Lia (19), for example, in response to her earlier distinctions between “good” and “bad” women regarding beauty said, “here, I just try to be true to my own understanding and my own standard of good, I guess. That’s what I am trying to live up to. Not other people’s standards.” Reclamations like this were more available to women as they lived overseas, but they were frequently accompanied by contradictions and conflicts. In many ways, women’s practices and shifting perspectives were fenced by the border between Australia and Indonesia.

Kade (20) came to an interview wearing a snug black turtleneck sweater tucked into a fitted, high-waisted blue jean skirt. Her skirt was mid-thigh length, and she wore
black stockings underneath with delicate black flats. She wore little makeup other than light pink lipstick. While Kade’s outfit seemed modest to me, as an outsider, she later told me that her father would “have a heart attack” if he saw her in those clothes because “it shows” her body more clearly. Thus, when Kade described her dress choices, she contrasted her experiences at home. She said, “I have different clothes for Australia and Indonesia.” Like Kade, numerous women engaged dress differently overseas, curating their clothing to context and audience. This included how they fixed their hair and makeup, and how or when they went out in public. Sukma (34), for example, cut her hair into a pixie cut. Her decision was not well-received at home, however, and she laughed as she told me that her grandmother and aunts told her that “a beautiful woman is one who has long hair, and black.” She said she didn’t understand how they could regulate the length of her hair and shrugged it off.

Agnes (27), like Sukma and Kade, slightly altered her appearance in Melbourne, despite knowing it would not be well-received at home. She said that piercings and tattoos are very negatively stereotyped in Indonesia, and women with piercings or tattoos are judged as sexually promiscuous “bad girls.” Edith (32) corroborated this: “having tattoo is like, ‘you are a whore, you are a slut’.” Nonetheless, Agnes had gotten her upper ear cartilage pierced. However, Agnes, like other respondents, was careful to make such choices covertly, and was keeping her piercing a secret from her parents and family. Women were conscious of their audiences; as such, they used secrecy as a tactic to control their visibility and manage transnational surveillance. Agnes smiled slyly as she talked about her secret piercing, suggesting her choice made her feel quite satisfied and
courageous, though she also admitted she felt anxious about revealing her choice to her parents and thought she might remove it before she returned home.

For respondents who identified as Muslim, choices around head covering was also a site for agency and contention overseas. In Indonesia, a generation of veiled fashionistas known as the “hijabers” (Beta 2014) is on the rise, combining high fashion and religious piety—or “pious fashion” (Bucar 2017). This changing Muslim fashion culture is surrounded by considerable tension, however, as more conservative stakeholders argue that women are becoming more materialistic consumers, less modest or virtuous than their pious fashion suggests (Jones 2010). As in the “veiling raids” (Wee 2012:36), women have been targeted for their veiling choices in the name of morality and feminine propriety. Scholars and hijabers alike, however, argue that “women might borrow from the authority of a discourse of consumer choice or of Islam to position themselves as controlling their [own] choices” (Jones 2010:620) and reclaim bodily autonomy while adhering to their personal identities and faith. Narratives of “heightened self-confidence and moral self-control” (Wee 2012:35) dominate hijaber fashion blogs and magazines, and veiling narratives captured in scholarship (Jones 2010; Wee 2012).

Diah (24) wore colourful, brightly patterned hijabs which she always coordinated with stylish, modern outfits. Once when we went out, for example, she donned a zebra-print hijab with a glamorous bright red overcoat. She said she had gradually started wearing the hijab only a few years earlier because her mother’s veiling fashion had influenced her and her sister to experiment themselves. Her hijab, she said, made her feel more feminine and confident, although she described herself as an “imperfect Muslim”
because of her short (shoulder-length) and stylish hijabs. Diah felt free to experiment with veiling fashion in Melbourne:

It’s becoming a big thing in Indonesia as well, becoming a trend. The hijabers. I have some friends really into it and getting some new hijab with flowers and everything and I just really wanted to wear it, so I wore it […] I put my hijab not as a limitation, but a way I can be creative and express myself […] I find Melbourne is really open to like, even Muslim [fashion]—it is really hip here.

For Diah, veiling was a tactic for enacting her personal agency and expressing her self-identity. For others, like Emma (32) and Sukma (34), the choice not to veil, despite pressure from their families and communities to do so, felt like a site for agency and being truer to their self-identities. Respondents wore their identities in a variety of new ways in Melbourne. Maya (24) and I went shopping at a large thrift store near her house. It was winter, so we were both wearing simple combinations of jeans, sweaters, boots and jackets. Inside, she told me she had “become more accustomed to the fashion climate in Melbourne” and that had given her the “freedom to express [herself] in terms of fashion choices.” She continued, “it sort of changes my perception of the world as well, that I am now a part of the fashionista group […] I am a different person now.”

As Maya became embedded in Melbourne’s famous fashion culture, she attributed this ontological shift to altering her personal sense of style in the space, free from judgment, she felt the city provided. We browsed for jackets as we talked. She was choosing between a simple denim jacket she described as the “practical” and “appropriate” choice, and a pink faux leather one with ruffle embellishments along the collar. She bought both. Later, Maya referenced this event as she described her growing self-confidence: “when you dress for the part, you are walking the part, you know?” For
contrast, she shared a story of her father’s concerns about, and efforts to manage, her changing wardrobe, and perhaps her changing attitude, in Indonesia:

Whenever I [go] back […] I am wearing stuff that I would normally wear here and not there, and I have received censure so many times because of that. Like ‘you are living in Indonesia right now, can you just modify your clothes?’ […] yes, it has to be modified, what’s appropriate. That’s really a big—like the safety that women have here, and the freedom of expression in doing things through your own fashion choices and the way you conduct yourself in public. You feel a sort of taken-for-granted safety that doesn’t happen in other countries.

Similarly, Rhea (29) said that in Australia, “good” and “bad” women are not differentiated by their appearance like in Indonesia, thus she was less fearful of judgment or stigma and had more bodily agency:

Women have more freedom to express themselves without being judged […] I have friends that wear veils and people were okay with that, but then I have friends as well who are always wearing skimpy, short clothes and they don’t have issues with that either! I find it’s really nice to have society that just gives you freedom to express yourself.

Like Maya and Rhea, women repeatedly contrasted their experiences of bodily surveillance at home with their choices in Melbourne to emphasize and celebrate their independence overseas. Like Maya, respondents often raised the issue of “safety.”

4.2.3 Safety, Femininity, and the Male Gaze

Respondents often referenced “safety” when describing their shifting choices regarding dress and their public lives. Perceptions of “safety” were twofold. Maya (24) described it as “what [women] can get away with doing without being harassed or judged.” Safety in Melbourne referred, on one hand, to a perceived freedom from judgment or gossip, stigma, and the sexual surveillance of women’s bodies. Edith (32) said that in Indonesia, she and other women worry about their “image” (or sexual
reputation) so they “try not to do over from the norm” or violate social expectations and norms.

On the other hand, “safety” often referred to a perceived safety from men and the male gaze. Dressing modestly protected women from both social shaming, and from violence and harassment from men whose “hydraulic sexuality” (Robinson 2015:55) and masculinities were explicitly privileged in Indonesia society. Because of Indonesia’s increasingly conservative, patriarchal order, respondents felt they were in constant negotiation of their sexual subordination and safety. Maya (24) described this as working to “balance not getting harassed and being proud enough in your skin to show what you’ve got.” She continued, “even in a very liberal region [in Indonesia], you will still get heckled, you will still get that kind of like, unsafe being in your own skin feeling. Even though you don’t necessarily wear revealing clothes.” Likewise, Kade (20), expressed her own concerns about dress and safety in Indonesia:

In Indonesia you get cat-called a lot for being female. Like, everywhere you go you get cat-called. So that’s why my dad is always like ‘you can wear a skirt, but it has to be knee-length’ or ‘you can wear a shirt, but it can’t be too fitted’ […] So, I can’t wear a tank top or anything like…it’s just too risky.

Kade continued, highlighting the relationship between this risk, and her transnational tactics of dress: “so, that’s the thing. I dress differently here. I get more freedom in what I wear because basically, I don’t get cat-called and I feel like it’s safer here.” In a similar vein, Sukma (34), when discussing safety and dress, referenced high rates of rape and sexual violence in Jakarta, and the ways media has directed blame towards women and their appearances:
So, there were a lot of—not there were, there are, a lot of rapes happening. Like, especially in Jakarta, people kept blaming women like 'oh, because she is wearing mini skirt' and stuff like that, while we are trying to say it’s not what we are wearing, but it’s about your head!

These narratives and events were some of the primary messages women received about sexuality and formed one aspect of the surveillance they were responding to as they made decisions overseas. Women were fearful about their public presence and its relationship to perceived sexual promiscuity. They were also angry about these discourses and the way they held women accountable for the violent actions of men. As such, they were critical of gendered inequality and sexual surveillance in Indonesia, even though they avoided standing in the “target range” (Maya, 24; see 2.5). Women’s subversion of dress expectations relied on keeping their transgressions hidden by controlling their online visibility. As they worked to enact a degree of agency through dress, they also carefully controlled the visibility of their practices to their networks at home to avoid the threat of reputational harm and exposure. Thus, while respondents celebrated some of the perceived emancipatory potential of life in Melbourne, this freedom was limited. In what follows, I describe digital surveillance and women’s active attempts to thwart it. I show that women struggled to subvert sexual surveillance by carefully curating online content visible to their communities at home.

4.3 Curating Content: Negotiating Digital Surveillance and Visibility Overseas

Digital communications and media brokered relationships between sojourning daughters and kin and communities at home (Kim 2011; Walton-Roberts 2015). The digital can integrate distanced social networks into “new spaces of social engagement” in receiving communities (Walton-Roberts 2015:77). As such, transnational sexual surveillance occurred largely online. Because of the sexually-symbolic significance of
many of their overseas practices, like dress, women’s online visibility could act as a substitute for in-person monitoring and control. At the same time, polymedia facilitated women’s tactics for controlling or intercepting surveillance and management by their communities at home.

Younger respondents described their social media use as transitioning away from Facebook, which they considered to be the domain of an older generation, in favour of platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. Most respondents across all ages were active on Facebook, however, as the primary platform for international connections, such as those with Australian classmates and other international students, and for connection to parents and kin in Indonesia. Nearly all respondents were using Instagram regularly. Women also used WhatsApp as the primary platform for their daily communications with family, friends, and other social networks, and it dominates communications in Indonesia more broadly (Susilo & Putranto 2018). This platform diversity illustrates the “integrated structure” of polymedia environments (Madianou & Miller 2012:170), in which a variety of platforms are concurrently used for varying and tailored interpersonal networks. However, “polymedia turns out to be much more than merely the configuration of disparate media into a package of familiar usage…polymedia becomes a kind of re-socializing communications. The decision to use this media when you might have used that one has become something a person will be judged for. So, polymedia uncovers the moral aspect of choosing between media” (Miller & Sinanan 2014:19). In this context, women were carefully negotiating these digital moralities as they carefully tinkered with platform-specific content and audiences to enact a degree of agency against pervasive digital sexual surveillance.
In the following sections, I describe digital surveillance as it manifested in transnational women’s lives, and how women respond to efforts by family and communities to control them from afar through careful media management and manipulation. Overall, the data suggests digital communications are both the primary means of transnational sexual surveillance, and resources women engage to claim a degree of agency overseas. However, the necessity of secrecy and media curation continues to highlight the ways women’s agency remains fenced by surveillance.

4.3.1 Digital Surveillance & “Diasporic Daughters”

In the context of transnational family dynamics, digital communications and social media facilitate the surveillance of daughters. Respondents often felt that their parents monitored their social media to determine their whereabouts and follow the ebb and flow of their lives overseas. For example, Agnes (27) said, “they want to know everything I am doing here” in a frustrated tone as she explained why she often ignores her mother’s calls. Parents were quick to question daughters’ posts and activities more broadly, including their dress choices and relationships, for example, with male peers. Both Edith (32) and Victoria (18), for example, described incidents where their families responded aggressively to photos they had posted of themselves with male friends. When women visibly transgressed expectations, they indicated a rebelliousness or shift in their behavioural practices that could suggest, to kin and communities at home, that they were being guided by, or subscribing to, a “looser morality” overseas. As such, parents used social media as a distanced disciplinary tool and attempted to regulate what their

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9 Kim 2011
daughters wore, who they were spending time with, where and when they were out in public, and even their romantic lives.

Many respondents felt monitored by their parents and extended kin networks, particularly aunts, whom they said reported back to their parents. Agnes (27), for example, said “I can see that they are checking a lot because I post a lot, so yeah […] they are pretty much checking everything on Instagram.” Most respondents found digital surveillance, for example their parents’ friends’ attempts at social media friendship, invasive and transparent efforts to monitor their practices and intervene in their lives overseas. Shani (21) detailed the changing digital relationship she had with her family:

My mom and dad have Instagram now! I am so annoyed, because now I can’t really have this like, the freedom of posting things. Like, what if I want to wear these clothes, or what if I want to pose with my boyfriend kissing me or something? I can’t really do that anymore.

A primary concern for daughters was the relationship between digital surveillance and dress. The two were frequently inseparable, as dress, because of its material and visible nature, was easily captured in photos of women’s transnational lives. Because it was visible, it was easily targeted. Santi (20) described feeling “pressure” to adhere to the expectations and norms of her family and community back home because of their ability to monitor her social media activity. She described similar experiences of her friends:

Our traditions, our moral lessons. It’s very important, but it’s pressuring sometimes. For example, you have to dress well […] some of my friend’s moms—if you use a bikini to the beach or something and you post it on Instagram, some of the parents will stalk that person and say that they don’t like it—too much exposure, things like that. It’s pressuring.

Respondents described constant communication with their families, who sought regular and detailed updates about their daughters’ activities. While some women ignored
the barrage of WhatsApp messages they said they received, most desired communication
in moderation. Many respondents described having “friendships” and connections with
their families, peers, and communities distributed across a number of different,
consciously mediated platforms. As such, their concerns about visibility, judgment and
gossip, and shame and stigma still plagued the way they experienced and negotiated their
online presence and the content of their digitally-mediated communications. Edith (32),
for example, felt that Facebook—the platform where she had the most “friendships” with
family and community members, thus the least posting freedom—was not a safe or
valuable space for her, but was instead a source of external control and judgments:

I have most of my family on Facebook, but I don’t really like to
communicate with them […] they are just like, talking. In front of me they
are nice but behind me they are not, so I just don’t like to be connected
with them […] because I know they are just adding some spices—in
Indonesia, means like, gossiping […] So, I have to be mindful about what
I post, especially if we talk about Facebook, because it’s just like that, my
family and stuff […] I feel like my privacy is threatened there.

As these rich insights from Edith illustrate, women’s concerns about judgment
and stigma in Indonesia endured through online spaces while they were overseas. Many
respondents shared similar experiences of being monitored, judged, or otherwise having
their privacy violated by digital surveillance by distanced kin and communities.
Additionally, polymedia was at once wielded as a tool for monitoring daughters, and for
intervening in their overseas lives. Diah (24), for example, spoke of her mother’s
attempts to use Diah’s social media photos to attempt romantic matchmaking behind her
back. While Diah tried to thwart these efforts by ignoring her mother’s requests for
photos, her sibling eventually took her photos offline and sent them to her mother
instead.
As in Diah’s experience, polymedia facilitated intervention and participation by kin in daughter’s lives overseas. Surveillance is embedded in social media, as it creates opportunities for management and control, and cultural expectations pervade social media use (Madianou & Miller 2012; Miller & Sinanan 2014). In what follows, however, I show how women responded to digital surveillance and cultural norms and values which permeated their online presence and practices. By curating what was visible to their networks at home, women enacted a degree of agency, which by its very nature remained fenced, to both show off their cosmopolitan lives overseas, and to disguise them.

4.3.2 Control the Medium, Control the Message

Respondents depended on social media to both maintain relationships and emotional connections to their families and friends at home, and to negotiate transnational surveillance. Many respondents said they felt a greater sense of self-control in Australia than they did when they were physically embedded in their communities at home. Women engaged their online presence and took advantage of the affordances of geographic distance through a variety of tactics that helped them control their visibility at home. For respondents, different communication platforms allowed for different management possibilities; some apps provided more security and freedom because of audience and the nature of posting, for example the limited permanency of posts through some apps, than others. Respondents also manipulated privacy settings and platform-specific content to tailor their needs within varying networks.
On one hand, women documented and represented their cosmopolitan, transnational lives to their communities back home through online spaces. For some, like Shani (21), this was seen as artificial or vain:

They are really into posting. Making this branding of themselves. Some people just want to be fancier on Instagram, you know? Like, ‘oh here I am, having a good life, I am traveling a lot, I have a lot of friends’ stuff like that […] the idealized representation of what they want their life to be, not what it is.

Others felt that they were more free to authentically “be themselves” online. Lia (19), for example, described herself as “more confident” online:

I feel like online I am still myself, but maybe with a little more energy, a little more oomph, a little more uncensored […] I am more open about my opinions online. Especially since most of my followers are my friends […] so we see eye-to-eye on more issues. I can say I am more comfortable expressing myself online.

Similarly, Rhea (29), though critical of a perceived over-reliance and potential inauthenticity of Indonesian women on social media, said, “on social media […] you don’t see your audience, so you can enhance confidence and expressing things, but in person you are hesitant to express because you are afraid of being judged.” These insights emphasize how women saw online media as space to express themselves in a way they could not do physically or in-person because of persistent fears of judgment, stigma, or reputational harm for violating norms and conventions. However, these excerpts also show that while women felt less censored online, judgment often endured online. Thus, women disguised their behaviours that might be judged negatively by others by carefully curating their content to their audience/platform. For example, Maya (24) described “sitting on materials before publishing them” to “filter everything that comes out of [her] life [in Melbourne].”
Discourses of judgment recurred in women’s responses and circulated primarily around dress and public behaviours, the visibility of which could be managed. While dress practices changed in Australia, controlling the visibility of these practices online was inseparable from the dress choices themselves. Because of the relationship between dress, the body, and sexuality, social media tactics were another way women worked to enact a degree of agency overseas and push back, lightly, against surveillance. Women disguised dress and other transgressive practices by manipulating polymedia’s capacity to conceal and reveal information. Kade (20), after noting her disparate wardrobes for Indonesia and Australia, said, “I change my privacy settings so when people tag me, the clothes that I’m like, yeah…I change my settings so they can’t see it, but they can only see other things. If my mom or dad found it, it would be like ‘uh…’.” Emma (32) also shared an experience of maternal digital surveillance and her own tactical negotiations:

E: She asked me like, ‘please don’t dress in shorts or like, short skirts or open shoulders, just dress as covered as you can’ but I don’t really do that [laughs]. You know what happened was, I am friends with my mother on Facebook, not any other social media, but I am friends with my brothers. And I posted this picture of me wearing shorts in the summer and I think my brother told that to my mother, because soon afterwards I received this message like, ‘I saw your picture wearing shorts. Please don’t do that. Wear something more covered next time’ and like, oh my God, it was the summer! So, I just ignored her […] I block all of my family except on Facebook, because Facebook is still okay, I just filter that anyways. But I have more freedom on other social platforms.

A: So, you find that you post differently on different platforms?

E: I do think it’s quite different. Just in terms of pictures, because my family judges me quite harshly in terms of what I wear, so I tend to post things like, you know, where I am wearing decent clothes […] or anything that says I have a boyfriend.

Emma’s insights demonstrate the tensions between surveillance and women’s tactics for enacting agency online, where respondents rarely outright resisted disciplinary discourses and monitoring, but strategically manipulated their visibility to conform to expectations.
and ideals from home. Thus, while these tactics represent a form of agency, it remains fenced by the force of stigma and shame in women’s lives.

As with Emma and Kade, the primary tactic women employed online was vigilantly manipulating photo or post-specific and content-specific privacy settings and filtering networks that could view particular content. Importantly, like in Emma’s case, women also used social media to control the visibility of their romantic and sexual relationships. In one instance, a respondent I “follow” on Instagram posted an Instagram story\(^\text{10}\) that indicated, upon viewing, that the post was only visible to a curated list of “close friends,” of which I had been included. The respondent had posted images of herself and her relatively new boyfriend, an Australian man, on a trip and sharing a hotel room. She was keeping the relationship a secret from her family, knowing they would not approve because of religious differences between them.

Agnes (27) shared a similar experience of filtering her followers on Instagram “stories” to ensure that she was in control of who could view her content, specifically hiding content from her parents and family:

> When I want to put something [online] I think twice […] and if something is happening and I don’t want my parents to know then sometimes I like, lock the privacy for my family until the story is gone, and then I open it again […] sometimes there is the thing you want to keep to yourself, but you want to say something on social media and you don’t want your parents to know.

Most respondents said they manipulated their privacy settings. Citra (18), for example, said her parents used social media to track her activities in Melbourne. She said

\(^{10}\) “Real time” images and videos that are captured and posted for “followers” which are only visible for 24 hours. Unlike Instagram posts, “stories” allow for temporary, audience-specific posts that eventually disappear.
she felt “more comfort if none of the family members see [her] stories” so she “hid” her posts from her family. Lia (19), similarly, once attended a drag show in Melbourne; she knew that her family and community shared larger heteronormative values and ideas about gender and sexuality in Indonesia, and felt she needed to disguise her participation:

Snapchat is a God-given, because even now my parents cannot figure out Snapchat and I feel like they have lost interest […] I do have my sister and a couple of my cousins on Snapchat, but if I am posting something that is a bit too…you know? [A: risqué?] yes! I can custom block them. Like, there was this drag queen competition in my college and one of my cousins is very, very conservative so I was like, ‘yep, you are blocked for 24 hours.’

Lia spoke of Snapchat as a “God-given” because her parents did not have access to the app, thus could not follow her activities through it. This data suggests that ultimately, daughters wanted more privacy but had difficulty negotiating it through most platforms, as parents were prevalent in their social media networks. Where parents were not connected to daughters, Lia and other respondents controlled the content visible to their extended families to ensure they did not report back to women’s parents. Further, as these excerpts suggest, controlled posting was strategically diffused around platform-specific networks. Respondents manipulated content based on specific platforms, where they managed and built curated networks. As Lia (19) described it, “Facebook has a reputation for parents like, policing their kids and busting their kids for every little thing they do. So, I was like ‘no, no, I am good with Twitter, thanks.’

Respondents also took advantage of geographic distance to ignore or reject some communications with home. Nonetheless, this agency was hard-won. Some respondents felt frustrated by the inundation of text messages and phone calls from family trying to monitor them, claiming it infringed on their independence and privacy overseas. As such,
they chose to ignore message from home, which they felt they could not do when they lived in Indonesia and with their families:

I always use WhatsApp, but these days I feel like I don’t want to open it because I just feel like, sometimes, I need my time alone. I don’t need to connect to other people. So yeah, there are messages, but I haven’t checked my WhatsApp for maybe a day or two now. (Edith, 32)

The geographic distance between Indonesia and Australia acted as a buffer zone that allowed women to control the frequency and content of communication and the line between women’s agency and surveillance. Like ignoring calls and text messages, respondents also rejected friendship and follower requests from individuals they felt would infringe on their perceived freedoms, though they were careful about who they rejected so they wouldn’t cause conflict when they returned to Indonesia. Shani (21), for example, shared her own experiences:

Back home it’s, again, really judgmental. So, I am like, maybe your parents are okay with it, but then you don’t really want your other family to see the post or something […] like, my aunts and stuff, they are very conservative and judgmental so nope, no way. I don’t accept [their requests].

Anxieties about judgment regularly emerged from these conversations. The same stigmas and potential shame women had to manage around marriage, education, dress and public behaviors also circulated in discourses and practices around online visibility. Women’s fears of being judged by their communities at home outweighed the potential consequences of ignoring or rejecting text messages, calls, and friendship requests.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that in the current digital era, the surveillance of sojourning Indonesian daughters, including the surveillance of sexuality, travels with
women as they voyage overseas for education. However, women do engage their transnational positionality to enact a degree of agency through tactics of dress and the digital. Overseas, women were often dressing and behaving differently, and for some, these changes could mark them as misbehaving or sexually inappropriate, subjecting them to stigma and the social consequences of harming their sexual reputations. By tinkering with privacy settings or carefully curating platform-specific content, women concealed their “transgressions,” including their dress and public behaviours, to feign a visible adherence to strict expectations from home. As interview data shows, women’s tactics are restricted by the temporariness of their migratory context. Thus, these relational practices are opportunistic, contextual, fenced, and dependent on women’s capacities for secrecy. These tactics were important to how women carved out space for their agency overseas, however, they were primarily directed to maintaining productive sexual reputations and harmonious relationships at home, reflecting enduring restrictions for women’s agency overseas. For this reason, “tactics” (Guell 2012) or “strategies” (de Certeau 1985) more adequately describes women’s agency than “resistance.” They allow women to take advantage of the context of geographic distance, but they do not push back against, or attempt to restructure, gender inequality or the regulation of women’s sexualities in Indonesia. Thus, “tactics” are means of enacting agency that remains “fenced” (Wardlow 2006).

The following chapter address the domain of dating and sex. I describe women’s practices around dating, including their use of dating apps, meanings and experiences of sexuality overseas, and the imperative of secrecy to women’s transnational sexual lives and agency.
Chapter 5: Dating, Sex, & the Secrecy Imperative


Caught in tensions between surveillance and their own sexual agency, Indonesian women do not always comply with expectations around marriageability, kin interests, religion, and cultural moralities as they navigate dating and sexual practice (Bennett 2005b; Blackwood 2007; Jennaway 2002). However, the intensity of sexual surveillance from home that women experience overseas forces them to negotiate dating\textsuperscript{11} and sex very carefully. Many respondents worked to enact a degree of sexual agency through a variety of tactics, maneuvering the ambiguous boundaries between their private and public lives. “Tactics” are flexible and creative tools and/or actions (Guell 2012) which allow women to manage or manipulate sexual surveillance and make their sexual or romantic lives satisfactory to them in challenging and complex circumstances. Women’s tactics in Melbourne circulate primarily around secrecy. Through such avenues as pacaran backstreet, or secret dating (Bennett 2005b), documented in Indonesia and also practiced in Melbourne, women engage secrecy as they navigate sexuality and desire, with or without actual sexual practice, to maintain a visible adherence to general principles of piety and morality at home.

Secrecy is an embodied, social practice shaped by context-specific strategies of disclosure and disguise (Hardon & Posel 2012). Overseas, shifting representations of sexuality and courtship influence women’s practices around secrecy as they amalgamate their history, culture and experiences from home within the freedoms and limitations

\textsuperscript{11} While existing literature focuses largely on “courtship” in Indonesia, I use “dating” in my own findings and writing to more adequately attend to the language and experiences of respondents.
posed by new geographic and social contexts (Winarnita 2016). Women’s secrets in
dating and sex were relational, featuring differing degrees of concealment that were
situation and relationship-specific. For respondents, dating and sexual practice occurred
along a spectrum of intimacy and involved complex negotiations of risk and reward.
Thus, secrecy is imperative, as the primary means by which women can enact a degree of
sexual agency in this context. While there is new space for choice and action overseas,
the legacy of sexual surveillance in Indonesia endures and shapes dating, sexual ideals
and practices transnationally.

In this chapter, I explore how women spoke of and engaged with dating and
sexual practice, including abstinence, overseas. I highlight external influences which
fenced women’s sexual agency and shaped how they made meaning of, and experienced,
dating and sex, focusing on the ways parents, kin, cultural, religion, and social norms
were invoked in conversations about the seemingly private or personal. Further, I
describe women’s tactics for negotiating dating and sex, specifically through acts of
revealing and concealing, and explore the ways women’s practices shifted in the
transnational context. First, I summarize respondents’ narratives and experiences of
dating and sex and show how secrecy was central to their practices overseas. In the latter
half of this chapter I present two case studies to illustrate the tensions between sexual
surveillance, women’s dating practices and sexual lives, and their tactics around secrecy
to highlight the ways transnational sexual surveillance continues to fence women’s sexual
agency.
5.2 Sojourning Daughters and Contemporary Courtship

While a “culture of shame” (Bennett 2005a:31) shrouds women’s sexualities in Indonesia, courtship remains a socially-sanctioned practice seen as necessary to procuring an appropriate suitor and a precursor to marriage (Smith-Hefner 2018). As such, parental expectations about dating mirrored those about marriage. Indonesian courtship is a “delicately choreographed interaction” (Smith-Hefner 2018:338) with clear behavioural boundaries and socially-constructed parameters (Bennett 2005b). Bennett (2005b:103) describes Indonesian courtship as a “social sport”:

The sport has explicit rules—the hegemonic sexual ideology; an umpire—the community in which women live; mechanisms for disciplining recalcitrant players—the social regulation of courtship through gossip, stigma and exclusion; and finally, expulsion from the game for reckless disregard for the rules—that is, for visible sexual transgressions. Moreover, the courtship game has different rules for players of different sex and sexually specific punishments for those players […] women who bend the rules with discretion do so because they do not wish to be thrown out of the game, they remain fixed on the ultimate trophy of marriage.

Bennett’s metaphor is useful for tracing contemporary Indonesian courtship practices and highlights the significance of secrecy to women’s social well-being. The extent of intervention and regulation in single women’s romantic lives through stigma, gossip and violence further blurs the boundaries between public and private and allows women little privacy or agency. Overseas, dating practices described by Bennett and other scholars of contemporary Indonesia endured, but were altered slightly by the affordances of geographic distance. In this context, there are new options for private expressions of desire and intimacy and women’s participation in courtship, primarily because respondents experienced some independence overseas, as they lived away from their parents and home communities.
5.2.1 Transnational Dating Practices and Meanings

Respondents did not take dating lightly, given the high sociocultural value of virginity and marriage. Despite some respondents claiming to be casual in dating, most women used similar language to describe dating as they did marriage: “commitment,” “serious,” “practical,” “investment,” “lifetime,” “candidate,” “waste my time.” This discursive pragmatism dominated women’s narratives and overshadowed ideas about love, romance, pleasure, or desire. Even overseas, dating was inseparable from marriage (Smith-Hefner 2018). Multiple constraints, such as family ties, community dynamics, socioeconomic status, cultural codes, and dominant prohibitive discourses continued to regulate women’s practices. Echoing most respondents’ narratives, for example, Kade (20) said, “when I think about dating, it’s not like, a casual fling. It’s long term. I want long term like—marry kind of thing. I have to think of the future.” This future-minded and pragmatic language dominated the ways women spoke of dating more broadly, highlighting both dating’s seriousness, and how women perceive their transnational positions as temporary, thus the ways their experiences are framed by understandings that they will eventually return home.

Respondents framed romance within a discourse of surveillance, mostly from parents. Parents attempted to strictly regulate daughters’ courtship practices, particularly as they aged, and often intervened, even from a distance, in their daughters’ romantic relationships by disapproving of suitors or demanding they locate marriage prospects. Mothers in particular tried to control their daughters’ dating. Parental religious and ethnic values dominated. Ayu’s (27) parents, for example, demanded she date and marry only Catholic Indonesian men. Ayu’s experiences were shared by all respondents, as parents tried to control the religion of their daughters’ suitors. Because parents viewed dating in
Australia as intercultural, secular, and sexually-liberal, respondents said their parents were afraid of them dating overseas. Even so, women struggled to carve out space to push the boundaries of the acceptable in the pursuit of their own desires overseas. Many said they were “open” to dating, and to dating across cultures and ethnicities in Australia.

Despite public and parental concerns and surveillance, most women were dating in some capacity. Of 16 respondents, six were in established, monogamous relationships they described as “boyfriend and girlfriend.” Four experimented with dating in Melbourne but had not formed serious relationships with the men they were seeing. The remaining six respondents, most of whom were under the age of 21, did not date in Australia. Of those in established relationships, two were long-distance. Nadya’s (34) boyfriend lived elsewhere in Asia and Sarah’s (29) remained in Indonesia. Edith (32) and Emma (32) were both in secret intercultural relationships but experienced fluctuations in relationship status during my fieldwork. Santi (20) and her Indonesian boyfriend met in Melbourne and they had been together five months, while Shani (21) had been dating an Australian man for over a year.

Despite enduring surveillance, many respondents, regardless of relationship status, described changes in their romantic ideals and practices overseas. Often, these experiences directly violated expectations from home. In Melbourne, women were sleeping over at boyfriends’ houses, dating men of different religious/ethnic/racial backgrounds, engaging in public and private displays of intimacy and affection, and in some instances, having sex with their boyfriends. For example, while recounting her dating life, Rhea (29) described experiences of novel autonomy: “I really enjoyed my time in Melbourne, because I felt like I had control over my life. I could do the things I
liked.” Shani (21) laughed in reference to her Caucasian Australian boyfriend as she told me about her parent’s expectations that she date and marry a Muslim Javanese man. Maya (24) had not dated in Indonesia but faced significant pressure from her family to do so, given her age. At first, because it would be difficult for her to return home “without something [or someone] to show for it,” she attempted to remedy her “condition” of being single through a series of romantic “experiments” in which she attempted to date men she was uninterested in. Later, however, she described how these experiences shifted her romantic perspectives and desires:

At first, I went into a paranoid delusion that if I don’t try then I am going to be judged as a failure and that led to the experiments, me regretting the experiments and then moving on. That is the hurdle I have gone through to arrive at the conclusion that it’s okay to not have any sort of plan, it’s okay not to be chasing people, it’s okay not to have that traditional structure of sexuality and marriage.

Similarly, Agnes (27) felt insecure because of her age, social norms, and parental expectations that she marry. Being single was a visible source of anxiety, and she hoped to procure a partner before she finished her degree so she might stay and establish residency in Australia. She had been “close to” an Indonesian man and fellow international student, but they hadn’t crossed the dating threshold. Agnes described her own shifting perspectives on dating: “before I only knew like, because I am Indonesian, so in my mindset I only wanted to date like, Chinese-Indonesian, because that’s what my parents want.” In contrast, she said she was more “open-minded” and interested in pursuing her own desires in Melbourne, despite her parent’s enduring expectations. She was, however, worried about cultural differences, particularly around sexual expectations, and divorce and had not dated anyone else.
The above section shows that women viewed relationships seriously and associated dating with marriage and sexual surveillance. It also shows, however, that they voiced shifting ideals, perspectives, and practices in light of their experiences overseas. This tension, between sexual surveillance and women’s agency, was mediated by tactics they employed to activate their sexual and romantic agency, primarily through secrecy and disclosure. In what follows, I describe how women employed secrecy to disguise potential relationship transgressions and to maintain socially productive sexual reputations and harmonious relationships with parents, kin, and communities at home.

5.2.2 Backstreet Boyfriends
Courtship patterns described for Indonesia (Bennett 2005b) endured in Melbourne but took different form. Women said they felt they had more anonymity and autonomy in Melbourne, and those who were dating experienced greater freedom in terms of partner choice, physical displays of affection—both public and private—and using secrecy to their advantage. Strategic practices of secrecy and revelation emerged at the forefront of many respondents’ narratives of their transnational dating experiences. In Melbourne, women practiced secrecy through omissions or only revealed a fraction of their romantic realities to avoid stigma and shame. They carefully tinkered with digital mediums to manage the visibility of their relationships and the messages their communities at home received. Thus secrecy, as in pacaran backstreet, remained a key armament in women’s transnational tactics for negotiating sexual surveillance, through exactly what women were keeping secret was varied and nuanced.

Women disguised their dating “experiments” and first kisses, interracial relationships, breakups, late-night dates, and sexual practices. For example, Maya (24),
responding to conditions of shame and expectation from her family and cultural milieu to find a suitor, chose to keep her dating “experiments” hidden from her family. She didn’t want them to pry or to pressure her about dating, given her lack of experience and their prior concerns, and didn’t want to admit that she had no luck and was increasingly uninterested in dating. Shani (21), in a relationship with a Caucasian Australian man when she was expected to date a Muslim Javanese man, initially kept her relationship a secret from her family to avoid the possibility for conflict. They were together over a year before her sister saw a post on social media and told her parents, who confronted her.

Similarly, Santi (20) was in a relationship with a young man from Java, like her. They met through a bible study group at her Indonesian church in Melbourne and had been dating about five months. Though Santi was religiously devout and committed to abstinence, she said she often found surveillance by her family and church “pressuring” and invasive of her life and freedoms overseas. She described feeling a greater self of responsibility to and for herself in Melbourne and was more committed to her sexual decisions. She often slept over at her boyfriend’s apartment, without having sexual intercourse, and described being more publicly affectionate in Melbourne than she could be in Indonesia, kissing and holding hands in public spaces. She confessed, however, that she kept much of her relationship, including these dating practices, a secret from her friends, church, and family out of fear they would judge her as sexually active, which made her feel quite isolated. She described her conflicting experience:

If you are sleeping together, there is more temptation to it, so they say that you have to prevent it. My priest has a lot to say about that […] but I don’t know… to some extent it’s not good for me and for the holiness of the relationship […] but sometimes it’s me like, I want to stay and lay there and things like that. I think the challenging part is controlling yourself.
When I asked Santi how they managed temptation and made decisions about sexuality, she told me that they were both committed to abstinence, but their sexual reputations and social well-being depended on keeping their relationship private. She continued:

> I think what we are doing right now is not as holy as the church wants it, but we know what are our boundaries and I know that we are responsible, not to the church, but we have a responsibility to God. It’s not about the church, but what is holy with God.

Because Santi saw her time in Australia as temporary, she felt that her otherwise transgressive practices were “okay” because they, too, were temporary. While Santi said she felt greater self-responsibility and freedom in Melbourne, where she lived independently of kin/neighbours and felt less fear of being judged (see 3.1.2), it was clear in Santi’s secrecy that pervasive surveillance continued to influence her sexual decision-making.

Women’s romantic secrets were diverse and varying, but underlying, they shared a common motive of avoiding shame and stigma or threatening their sexual reputations at home. Agnes (27) admitted she had little experience with dating in Indonesia. She contrasted her experiences in Melbourne:

> I still had my parents and I had to find a way to sneak from them […] but here, when I first arrived I met one guy and we were pretty close and I felt like, because I didn’t have my parents here, I could go anywhere, and I can do anything. So, I think that’s different.

At first, despite her mother’s prying (“any luck?”), Agnes had kept this man, and their closeness, a secret from her family. Though she was very active on social media, she was careful not to post anything about him, and when her mother called she struggled to avoid conversations about dating and marriage. Eventually Agnes did tell her mother a bit about him and their time together, but they were no longer seeing each other. The relationship’s
termination weighed heavily on Agnes, given her palpable anxiety over her singlehood and her parent’s expectations. Because of this, she kept the fact that they were not seeing each other a secret from her parents:

Then when things is not really working out between us, it’s pretty hard to tell your parents, even if we are like, still friends. My mom asks like, ‘how about him?’ and I don’t know how to answer, so I try to cover it up [...] I don’t want to tell them ‘no, we never meet each other for quite a long time now’ [...] maybe because I can’t handle that. So, it’s just better I keep it to myself.

Agnes’s experience highlights the diversity of women’s tactical engagements with disclosure and the relationship between women’s agency, shame and surveillance. As in the case of Maya (24), who emphasized that transnational women could not reasonably stand in the “target range” of exposure (see 2.5), many respondents carefully balanced the (in)visibility of their lives and the dangers of sexual surveillance. This section has touched on the nuances of women’s transnational dating experiences and illustrated that secrecy was both tactic, and imperative, for women’s agency in this context. The following section builds on the significance of the transnational context by looking at women’s use of dating apps. While dating through apps represents a relatively unique aspect of respondents’ transnational dating experiences it was quite common among respondents, yet it remains an under-researched topic in scholarship on contemporary dating and sexuality in Indonesia more broadly.

5.3 Dating and Digital Infrastructures

In the current era, media and social networking applications (apps), including dating apps, are shifting dating and sexual practices (Hearn 2006). The internet is one significant way that the already blurred boundaries between public and private, in the
context of sexuality, are destabilized, as media is “implicated in the social surveillance of sexuality, frequently reporting on sex scandals and framing exposure of ‘sexual deviance’ as entertainment” (Bennett & Davies 2015:8). Given the ubiquity of mobile phones, citizens are active participants in the broadcasting and shaming of others’ private lives. For example, in Indonesia’s conservative province of Aceh, the only sharia-ruled region in the country, several unmarried couples have been publicly caned for standing too close together, for public displays of affection, and for being caught or suspected of having premarital sex. The sea of mobile phones at these events (see Figure 1) illustrates the harsh realities of how circulating online images work to police sexuality and highlight the relationship between digital media, shame, and the surveillance of sexuality in Indonesia.

In late 2016, the Indonesian government banned nearly a dozen gay dating apps in an effort to control and eradicate homosexuality in the country (Yulius 2016). Today, Indonesia has banned almost 80 apps and 169 websites with LGBTQ+ content or audiences (Renaldi 2018), illustrating the breadth and scope of sexual surveillance in the country. Despite increasing sexual conservatism, Tinder and other heterosexual dating platforms remain unbanned. While there has been scant scholarship on dating apps within Indonesia, Chalkley (2016:158) suggests that Indonesian youth view “moderated dating” as an increasingly “normal” practice, driven by delayed marriage age trends, personal circumstances and growing social reforms in Indonesia.

Half of respondents were experimenting with dating apps while in Australia. While some noted that the use of dating apps by single, young Indonesians is increasingly common in Indonesia, this group of women used apps only after they had moved to Melbourne. This suggests that dating apps were a unique feature of women’s experiences
of dating and sex overseas. In what follows, I explore respondents’ use of dating apps and argue that these technologies are a unique feature of single women’s transnational dating experiences which violate expectations and norms from women’s communities at home. However, these practices still remain firmly entangled in the tension between pervasive sexual surveillance and women’s sexual agency. Thus, women continued to strategically negotiate the boundaries of privacy and publicity in their use of these platforms.

5.3.1 Dating Apps

Eight respondents used dating apps. While usage practices and results varied, they all began experimenting with these apps, specifically Tinder, in Australia. Two used Tinder in Indonesia while visiting home. In the context of reduced pressure to date and marry, only two respondents under 24 used dating apps. Younger respondents largely viewed dating apps as a desperate last resort. When asked whether she had ever used dating apps, Victoria (18) giggled and covered her face exaggeratedly. She said:

No! I don’t think I would because, I don’t know, I just have this perception in mind that dating apps are like…for desperates. That’s what people think, it’s just for desperate people who can’t find their love life in real life […] it sort of creates a negative perception of you.

Like Victoria, many younger respondents framed their aversion to dating apps in terms of their larger social contexts, referring to how their peers, family, and communities would judge them for their use. Regardless of respondent age, dating remained a collective affair, thus women’s sexual agency remained hindered in their use of dating apps. Parental approval and involvement was the norm, and dating’s more serious nature influenced how women viewed dating apps. Shani (21) was the only respondent under 24 that was “successful” in her use of dating apps. In contrast, Santi (20) said she had only tried Tinder for “three days” before her Indonesian church friends
had chastised her for it, telling her it was too dangerous because of the sexualized nature or stereotypes of Tinder dating.

For users and non-users alike, use was described in terms of risk and reward. Anxieties about the “hook-up culture” and safety permeated this discourse. Most respondents viewed dating apps as more dangerous in Indonesia, citing larger safety issues and statistics. Sukma (34), for example, referred to high rates of rape and sexual violence in Jakarta and said she felt more comfortable using apps in Australia, where they were more normalized or frequented by the general public. Others argued that dating apps were just “not part of the culture” (Agnes, 27; Kade, 20) in Indonesia. Respondents agreed that the hook-up culture was more of a risk in Australia, however, where there was a more liberal sexual culture overall. Emma (32) tried Tinder after a recent breakup while she was visiting home. She was anxious about continuing her use in Australia, referring to cultural differences and anxieties about sexual expectations:

You have to be careful, because Tinder is part of the hook up culture and with both guys I matched with I said to them from the beginning that I am not looking for hookups […] I haven’t used Tinder here because I think I am feeling a bit more anxious about the hook up culture. Because in Indonesia there is, you know, some social control […] you still have the social norms, even on Tinder. Men are more reluctant to engage you for hook ups, I think, back home.

Respondents that used dating apps felt it necessary to preface their responses with disclaimers about not looking for hook-ups, saying they made that clear in their profiles and during their usage. Despite their shifting practices, sexual surveillance and the fear of being judged by others persisted. As a result, women were secretive about their use. They were especially careful to hide their practices from their families because they would disapprove of the courtship method, particularly in a foreign context given dominant
perceptions of Western sexual liberalism. At the same time, women were sharing their experiences with, and trying apps on the recommendations of, their female friends. However, this was also carefully controlled, as all sexually-active respondents had used dating apps and were secretive about the extent of their app-facilitated relationships.

Women’s visions of the hook-up culture and differences around sexual expectations were rooted in, and reinforced, dominant discourses about the dangers of premarital sex. However, how women evaluated risk and reward differed, and often the use of dating apps outweighed the risks of the hook-up culture or unsafety and could offer opportunities for sexual agency. Women felt they could take control of their romantic lives or experience social and cultural integration in Australia, but this, too, was often related to sexual surveillance and pressures from home. For example, both Agnes (27) and Sukma (34) felt that dating apps were risky, but they tried them because they wanted to stay in Australia. For both, fears of returning home single, at their age, outweighed the risks of discomfort they might feel using Tinder. However, Shani (21) used dating apps for companionship in Australia. She had met her long-term Australian boyfriend on Tinder but said her use had been casual before she met him: “the reason I would ever really want to hang out on Tinder was like, usually just going out for a dinner or drinking at a bar, or a hook up. Just because like, it’s nice to have company. And to have someone to talk to. And then *jackpot!*” Looking for companionship, Edith (32) also found that her use of dating apps positively altered the way she felt about herself and her body, as well as dating more broadly. She described her experience:

I was giving it a try because I thought like, love can come in many ways, including this as a platform—Tinder [...] and thank God for Tinder because I stated to know guys and then like, that kind of perspective of myself, again, body shaming back in Indonesia but then here people can
accept me just the way I am, no matter what shape you are. And it made me think about me in a different way [...] you realize you have your worth, you know?

While age and cultural conventions which make dating a more serious matter still played into how women were using dating apps, the experience for those who tried them was largely positive, albeit scandalous and necessarily private. As with Edith, all sexually-active respondents experimented with Tinder, though only three had sex with men they met through it. Using dating apps sometimes defied expectations around dating and secrecy, as respondents frequently referred to friends who were using apps and had encouraged them to try these resources themselves. In the context of dating apps, mobility created new spaces for many women to experiment and play, where they negotiated their desires and surveillance in novel experiences of dating and sexuality. In what follows, I move from a focus on dating to women’s responses on sexual practice in Melbourne. I highlight the imperative of secrecy as it manifests in the ways women discuss sex and sexuality.

5.4 Sexual Perspectives and Practices

Of 16 respondents, five had been sexually active while studying in Australia. Only one was sexually active prior to Melbourne, but she had nonetheless been on an international academic exchange when she first had sex. Four were in established, monogamous relationships with the men they had sex with. Only one sexually-active respondent was under 29 years old. Younger respondents felt less pressure to find suitors and were largely not dating, thus they were also less likely to have sex. Older respondents, however, faced significant pressure to find suitable partners and marry, thus they were more likely to be dating and be sexually active. In addition to age, sexual
practice was associated with having previous independent experience abroad, having previous dating experience, and being in intercultural relationships in Melbourne (see Table 1). Because of the highly symbolic weight of sex within marriage, sexually-active respondents kept their sexual lives secret.

Marriage, as noted, was the primary factor influencing women’s decisions around abstinence and sexual practice, but it was always linked to the expectations of kin and what respondents termed “Indonesian culture.” Sexually-active respondents reflected this association in their language of sex. They rarely spoke of love, pleasure, desire, or eroticism, and were perceptibly reticent as they lowered their voices to say such words as “sex” or “condom.” Instead, responses focused on “responsibility,” “maturity,” and “commitment,” echoing the pragmatic language that defined dating narratives and reflecting the ways surveillance becomes embodied in dating and sex’s gravity in their lives. Both respondents who had sex and those who did not focused primarily on the expectations of others. Ayu (27), for example, said:

For my personal opinion, it’s up to the people. I don’t want to judge people who do that […] but back in Indonesia, you cannot do that. Because it’s like, it’s against all of the religions in Indonesia, so it’s not good. Society will judge you for that.

Regardless of the religious diversity of respondents, religion was intimately interwoven into women’s narratives of sexual surveillance, kin interests, and their own sexual or romantic ideals and practices. Despite religious conservativism, however, most respondents did not initially reference their own religious convictions when explaining their sexual decisions, but referred foremost to the stigma, judgment, kin, social norms, and dominant sexual values of others. Agnes (27) for example, explained her choice to be
abstinent in reference to wider cultural norms: “because as long as I have known, we should do sex after marriage. And then, that still applies to me, I think, because of my culture and my family. We are not supposed to have sex before marriage.” Because women invariably returned to sexual prohibitions and their fears of judgment when grappling with their responses to questions about sex, it was clear that sexuality, like courtship, is a collective matter.

External influences continued to shape and regulate women’s sexual practices and responses, highlighting the blurred boundaries between public and private. In the transnational context, however, that fine line was more easily navigated, given geographic distance from home and relative independence overseas. Despite the instability of it, being overseas did create some space for women to enact or embrace their sexual agency, to an extent. Nadya (34) described feeling conflict, given her cultural background, about what level of physical intimacy she would allow herself, but eventually decided to have sex with her boyfriend, and said she felt confident making her own decisions. Similarly, Rhea (29) argued that it was her body and her right to choose. When I asked Rhea about her decision to have sex, she said:

That was one of my choices at the time. I could do whatever I wanted, because I also had limited social access to the Indonesian community, even though they probably always found out whether or who I was dating or what I was doing. I didn’t really give others the attention. All my decisions, dating or not, was about whether I want to or not. Not because I was afraid of everybody else judging me.

Despite the violent stigmatization of female sexuality and the realities of sexual surveillance, Rhea found the space overseas to disentangle herself from the judgments of others. Respondents were more inclined to claim responsibility for their actions and
choices. Even those who remained abstinent experienced shifts in their practices, ideals, and opinions and pushed the boundaries of permissible physical intimacy, parental suitor expectations, and the public-private divide. Like other sexually-active respondents, Rhea verbally embraced her own sexual decisions, through this was always fraught and ambivalent.

While no sexually-active respondent said they regretted their decision, most felt significant turmoil over the conflict between their sexual decisions and their fears of being judged, stigmatized, ostracized, or subject to social violence, both in their Indonesian community in Melbourne, and after they would return home. Thus, secrecy was necessarily embedded in all women’s experiences of sex and sexuality overseas. Given the imperative of secrecy, respondents believed sex was more common among unmarried Indonesian couples than was stated. Lia (19) for example, said that because “repression is such a huge part of Indonesian culture,” a mentality of “don’t air your dirty laundry” frames female sexuality more broadly. Emma (32) similarly said, “it’s not like couples in Indonesia who are unmarried don’t do sex, they do, they just don’t talk about it.” Sexuality broadly was similarly framed by respondents in relation to cultural silences and dominant sexual values in Indonesia.

Sexuality was also framed as dangerous, particularly in relation to premarital pregnancy. Pregnancy could make sexual transgressions visible, unmasking women’s diligent efforts at secrecy and exposing them to stigma, public shaming, violence or harassment, and social ostracism. As such, pregnancy was the most effective deterrent of premarital sex, and was a primary concern invoked by respondents who were having sex. Shani (21) was in a sexual relationship with her Australian boyfriend. She had not
received any sexual education in school and said she was incredibly anxious about premarital pregnancy when they first decided to have sex but was too afraid to talk about it with anyone else. Many respondents cited the lack of sexual education and access to reproductive and sexual health as barriers to their sexual knowledge and agency. Respondents recognized that the silence and secrecy shrouding sexuality in Indonesia was embodied in health (Butt 2011; Bennett 2015) and education programs (Holzner & Oetomo 2004) and shaped the way they engaged with, and spoke of, sexuality more broadly. They often contrasted the stigma in Indonesia with the openness in Melbourne regarding sexuality health messages and resources. Rhea (29), for example, said:

The sexual health campaigns being done at the university, for me, once I found out that I had the access to sexual health, I signed up for that because that’s the thing I could not find anywhere in Indonesia. Even though they have those services in Indonesia, there is going to be judgment and prejudice from people around you.

While sexuality, as this section shows, is dominated by prohibitive discourses of shame, external regulation, danger and consequence, for some women mobility, despite its ambivalence, changes how they practice and perceive sex and sexuality. However, women’s changing attitudes and behaviours are vigilantly shrouded in secrecy to avoid the social repercussions of reputational harm. Following, I present detailed case studies of two sexually-active respondents to illustrate the tensions between women’s sexual agency, transnational sexual surveillance, and the secrecy imperative. I show how women struggle to enact a degree of agency against pervasive fear of stigma and shame and within severely limited freedoms afforded by their migratory context. Sexual surveillance continues to fence women’s agency and regulate their behaviours. Because of the temporariness of their migration, women struggle to negotiate a degree of sexual agency
which they disguise to quell the threat reputational harm poses to their lives and well-being after they return to Indonesia.

5.5 Revisiting Dating and Sexual Practice in the Transnational Context

In what follows, I present case studies of two respondents, Emma and Edith, to illustrate how sexually-active respondents negotiate their sexual decisions in the context of intensive, often violent, surveillance from home. Central to this, Edith and Emma carefully employ secrecy, which allows for their limited sexual agency.

5.5.1 Emma’s Story: “A Separate Life”

Emma was 32 years old, Muslim, and had spent many years living in a major urban centre a short distance from her hometown. At our first interview, Emma was in a relationship with an agnostic man, Daniel¹², who was living as a permanent resident in Melbourne. They had been together five months. By our second interview, however, the two had broken up. Earlier on, Emma’s primary concern about her relationship was her mother. She was keeping it secret from her mother because she felt unprepared for the conflict it would cause, given her boyfriend had different religious, ethnic and national backgrounds than her. She described it as keeping “a separate life.” Emma’s immediate reference to her mother in our conversations about her dating and sexual life highlighted the influence external networks of kin and communities have in women’s lives overseas, as well as the role of secrecy in maintaining relationships with both suitors and kin. When I asked Emma how she reconciled her mother’s expectations with her own desires and practices, she said, “It’s just a different idea of living. I think I am more modern about

¹² Pseudonyms are used for all names in this thesis
life, and marriage, and sexuality, and everything. My mother is very conservative, so she still has these traditional expectations of a woman.”

Daniel was the first and only man Emma had ever had sex with. Emma struggled with her decision to have sex, and experienced both positive self-identity change regarding her sexual agency, as well as intense anxiety over cultural expectations or norms, and the potential consequences of having her choice exposed to her larger social network. Emma necessarily kept her sexual relationship a secret from everyone in her life, which sometimes made her feel isolated. She said, “it’s just hard to be yourself in that context […] because here, I have more sexual freedom to express myself with my boyfriend. But at home, not a thing. You have to maintain a façade.” Emma felt that many couple in Indonesia were having sex, but like her, they struggled to disguise their choices. She continued, “coming back home, I don’t know how I will identify myself in that. I would never tell my mother, because she will kill me, but I think there is an internal conflict I am feeling about who I am back home and who I am right now.”

Emma struggled with her changing self-identity. Further, she was anxious about what could happen if she eventually faced a decision about disclosing her sexual history to a potential Indonesian suitor. She was afraid, she said, of “social censorship” and persecution so she avoided “mixing social circles” of her Indonesian community in Melbourne and her boyfriend. She also vigilantly hid her relationship on all social media. While some of her friends, both in Melbourne and Indonesia, knew of her relationship, she had not told anyone that she had sex. At that time, I was the first and only person she had told. She said that many transnational women, like her, “find freedom [in Melbourne]
[...] so that’s why we feel more liberated here, because you don’t get judged as much. I mean, you can express your sexuality more here.”

In one instance, Emma and her boyfriend talked about sexual health and contraception after an incident where a condom broke. Daniel suggested she start taking birth control as an added measure of caution. After days of scouring the internet for her sexual health information, Emma saw a GP. They discussed her options, but Emma told me that her anxiety about sexual surveillance infiltrated this process:

You can take pills or whatever, but even to consider it, I was still feeling stigmatized by myself [...] Like, since I am using the pills, would people think that I am sexually loose? You know, I still feel afraid that people will judge me. I know that people won’t know if I don’t tell them, but since pills you have to use every day, I was think about the practicality of it. Like, I would have to take the medication at the exact time, so would people notice the habit?

Emma’s response to sexual health was typical of Indonesian women, because of the shame and toxic morality that accompanies sexual and reproductive health in Indonesia (Butt 2015; Bennett 2015), which is still legally unavailable to unmarried women. Unmarried women accessing such services experience stigma, gossip, public humiliation in waiting rooms as they are asked by attendants for marriage certificates, and inadequate service delivery as doctors act as “moral guardians” (Bennett 2015:162) of women’s virtues, failing to provide proper information to avoid discussing sex and sexuality (Bennett 2015). Like many respondents in conversations about dating and sexuality, Emma contrasted her experiences in Indonesia and Australia. In part, these experiences were unique to her context as an international student, exposed to more liberal attitudes towards gender and sexuality promulgated on “Western” university campuses:
I am amazed at how they are very open in advocating for sexual health and stuff, you know, doing safe sex. It’s very different message from here and Indonesia. In Indonesia, you don’t do sex outside of marriage, it’s sinful, blah, blah, blah. But here is like, ‘hey, just do it safely, it’s for your own health, your own safety, your own good’ [...] the culture of the university is really open.

These excerpts highlight how women’s fears of reputational harm and social consequence control and regulate their sexual decisions and restrict their sexual agency, which can have detrimental impacts on their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Additionally, while their transnationalism altered the way they viewed sexuality, they were never free of the constraints of home. Emma and Daniel broke up shortly after this incident, so Emma never did procure contraceptive pills.

After their break up, Emma described her reluctance to disclose her sexual status to others: “deep down, I still feel insecure [...] and I didn’t want to be in the position to have to justify my choice.” She continued, describing the isolation some women experience given the imperative of secrecy: “I think in Indonesia, the problem is not sexuality itself, it is that its not being talked about. Because we don’t talk about [sex], it feels like we are on our own.” Like Emma, many respondents experienced conflict between their capacity for autonomous decision-making and sexual desire, on one hand, and their fears of surveillance and judgment on the other. Emma’s challenges with surveillance and secrecy, and internal conflict about her own choices, can illustrate how the disciplinary regulation of their sexualities fences women’s sexual agency.

5.5.2 Edith’s Story: “It Made Me Think about Me in a Different Way”

Edith was 32, Christian, and from a major Indonesian urban centre. A product of experiences with significant body shaming and unwanted sexual attention from men, Edith did not date prior to moving to Melbourne. At our first interview, she had recently
reconnected with a man she met on Tinder and they had decided to try their relationship again. They had been together about three months. He was Christian, though less devout than Edith. He had also migrated from Southern Africa some years earlier and was living as a permanent resident in Melbourne. Edith felt she could not tell her mother, or anyone else back home, about her relationships with a black man because of strong racism and hardline parental expectations about suitors she described as commonplace in Indonesia. Her mother would never approve. Edith felt she couldn’t blame her mother, because “I am here, and I can see different people and I can see a different world, but she is still there.” She continued, “the culture we have in Indonesia is totally different. But for me like, I am in Australia, so it’s okay.”

Edith and her boyfriend were also having sex. When I asked about her choice to do so, she spoke of personal growth in Melbourne, a sense of self-responsibility, and feeling more open to her own desires. However, she also grew angry as she spoke of sexual surveillance and gender inequality at home and how this caused her to experience significant internal conflict over her decisions. She said:

When you know that this is exactly the right person to be with, that’s it […] when I did this, I did this by consent and mutual agreement with my partner, and that’s okay. It’s between me and him. Even though there is a contradiction inside me, because in Indonesia culture, it is not allowed to do that, to have sex before marriage.

While Edith felt she had made the right decision for her, it was nonetheless challenged by her fears of stigma and shame at home. She said, “at first, I was not happy, because I was breaking the barriers, you know?” She continued,

It’s awkward for me. Women are not allowed to do that, in Indonesia, and then like…it’s just like this—if the seal is broken, you can’t buy it, you know? And I think like, I am not goods. I am not material […] and what I
see is like, what about the men? Men also have to be responsible right? But what I can sense is that women are always the ones being judged.

Edith was frustrated by the control and regulation of sexuality in Indonesia and women’s limited sexual rights. Though she felt it was “good to wait for the right person,” she said, “but it’s based on us. Like, if we want to accept that or not. Because, again, it’s us. It’s our decision […] it’s our right. If we talk about freedom to choose, this is what we choose.” Given this conflict between her sexual agency and the realities of sexual surveillance in Indonesia, and despite feeling strong in her convictions, Edith was careful to keep her practices and perspectives to herself: “as long as I am responsible to myself and I know what I want and what I do, and I don’t harm anyone else, then the risk is mine. I will take all the risk. Though yeah, I don’t want to talk about it to anyone.” She, too, carefully negotiated the blurred boundaries between public and private, as well as risk and reward (or more aptly, risk and choice/practice), through secrecy. She continued:

I cannot trust people. My friends and family back in Indonesia, they don’t know about [her sex life]. Because I know that if I talk about it they will just judge me, and they will say like, ‘you are being a whore, you are being a slut’ […] And it’s my personal choice, you know? It’s up to me. I don’t want to tell them, and I think they don’t have to know about it as well, because like for me, I don’t give a fuck about their business […] so I don’t want to share my own business with them […] That’s the thing that really changes me. I feel like right now I am a different way.

The social surveillance of women’s sexualities, and the violent threat of being judged, stigmatized, abused, persecuted, or ostracized continued to loom large in Edith’s narratives, despite her desire and struggle for a degree of sexual agency. Edith’s responses marked her, in some ways, as an outlier, as she claimed a higher degree of sexual freedom and more aggressively criticized sexual surveillance at home. However, like other respondents, Edith was unable to embrace full confidence in her decisions
because of enduring fears of judgment. She often contrasted her two geographic locations, signifying her simultaneous and sometimes conflicting embeddedness in both places. Despite her mobility and geographic distance, she also frequently referenced her mother, kin, friends, communities and larger Indonesian society and culture, emphasizing the blurred boundaries between the personal and the public, and the need to carefully walk the fine line between. While being overseas afforded new opportunities for intimacy and expressing desire, Edith, and all respondents, were careful to conceal the visibility of their practices.

5.6 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have described Indonesian women’s dating and sexual practices and perspectives in the transnational context. Despite geographic distance and relative independence overseas, women’s fears of pervasive surveillance and violence persisted and acted as significant boundaries to their sexual agency overseas. Respondents’ sexual self-images were heavily dependent on believing they were autonomous, in control of their romantic and sexual lives, and in attempting to deny external influences which ultimately shaped how they engaged with dating and sex. Women mediated the conflict between sexual surveillance and their own capacities for agency through tactics of secrecy and disclosure, which they enacted to garner a greater sense of control over their romantic lives than they had experienced previously.

Hardon and Posel (2012:S4) emphasize secrecy’s “complex play of light and shade…what we reveal and what we withhold are sites of negotiations integral to the ways in which we inhabit the social world…can be a defensive response to avoid social stigma…[or] a tactic to assert an advantage.” Transnational women enacted secrecy in
novel ways because they were not living at home with their parents or under the watchful
gaze of their communities and felt more capable of participating in romantic relationships
that suited their (changing) desires and interests. However, while many of their practices
shifted overseas, they struggled with anxieties about being judged or exposed in their
decision-making. The price of visibility is social ostracism, dishonouring self and family,
threatening marriage prospects, judgment, stigma, gossip, and even violence or
harassment. These punitive effects of social stigma and internalized shame form major
impediments to being public about one’s sexuality and to sexual health and well-being
(Herek et al. 2007). Thus, enduring sexual surveillance and threats of violence meant that
public sexual transgressions were simply not a viable option for women, even
transnationally. Secrecy remained imperative, despite the distance from home.

This chapter demonstrates some of the life challenges for transnational women as
they navigate sexuality while they are under significant surveillance. Results challenge
assumptions about Indonesian women’s chaste sexual homogeneity and highlight some of
the multiplicity and fluidity of actual sexual and romantic practices and perspectives in
real-life contexts. Women’s experiences while overseas are constantly changing. Their
secretive strategies for enacting a degree of sexual agency overseas respond to the
dominant sexual values placed on women in their patriarchal home contexts, reinforced
by severe social violence, which insist that women’s sexualities are only legitimately
expressed within marriage. In the final chapter of this thesis, I review the main findings
of this research, attend to its implications, and address possible future research agendas.
Chapter 6: Conclusions & Future Research Directions

This thesis has described the experiences of a mobile generation of unmarried Indonesian women living and studying in Melbourne, Australia as they navigate sexuality in the context of transnationalism. I have described women’s tactical strategies to negotiate a degree of sexual agency against pervasive and often violent sexual surveillance by parents, kin, communities and national Indonesian political moralities. Using data collected during fieldwork in Melbourne from April-July of 2017, I have described the powerful force of social sexual surveillance in 16 unmarried women’s lives. Sexual control endures as they sojourn overseas. I have also highlighted the limited range of tactics women employ to negotiate surveillance and garner a greater sense of personal and sexual agency while they are overseas. Tactics of dress, curated digital communications, and secrecy were some of the transnational strategies women used.

Given the extent and nature of sexual surveillance, and the fears that women internalize, their seemingly small tactics—wearing skirts, manipulating their Facebook privacy settings, keeping a secret—are that much more significant. While expectations and norms from home sometimes complemented the ways women experienced and conducted their lives, including their sexual lives, overseas, most respondents experienced significant challenge reconciling their desires and practices overseas with family and community ideals. For these women, secrecy around sexual agency was both tactic, and imperative. While differences of shifting geographic and cultural contexts do alter mobile women’s practices, ideals, and perspectives, their perceptions of freedom are limited by the temporariness of their migratory context. Women carefully manage the
transparency of their overseas to avoid stigma and shame, and to maintain productive and harmonious social relationships and sexual reputations at home.

6.2 Implications

This research contributes to a substantial, and growing, body of scholarship on sexuality in contemporary Indonesia (e.g. Bennett & Davies 2015; Boellstorff 2005; Robinson 2015; Wee 2012; Winarnita 2016). This research is the first to explore young, unmarried women’s sexualities in the context of transnationalism. This study may serve to elevate awareness and understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Indonesian women who face significant barriers to gender and sexual autonomy, rights, and freedoms. This research highlights the nuanced, dynamic, and constantly shifting sexual lives of single, transnational Indonesian women who have historically been denied transnational mobility and romantic autonomy. Transnational women students have increased their educational opportunities, and they have also gained a voice, albeit partial, regarding their sexual and gendered lives. This research is a chance for women’s voices to be heard. This voice could be powerful in advocating for access to comprehensive sexual education, reproductive rights and sexual health.

6.3 Possibilities for Future Research Agendas

This research has laid the foundations for possible future research. Existing literature on sexuality in Indonesia is largely devoid of attention to the ways mobility impacts sexuality (Bennett & Davies 2015). In order to more fully understand the role transnationalism plays in the sexual lives of unmarried Indonesian women, particularly in this context of temporary migration for post-secondary education, future research might
trace their experiences as they return to Indonesia and settle back into their lives at home, looking at the impact of their time abroad on their domestic lives. This research could more fully explore the dynamics of temporary transnationalism by describing how unmarried women who are expected to return to their parents’ homes and their pre-migration communities manage to negotiate their sexuality. Given the political shifts currently ongoing in Indonesia, research moving forward can take into account the way political efforts shift attitudes and practices regarding unmarried women’s sexualities in the nation. How women engage with shifting moralities in light of their experiences abroad can provide an important area of inquiry for understanding and advocating for women’s sexual and personal autonomy, as well as the larger issue of fundamental human rights in Indonesia.

The Indonesian criminal code revisions also offers an important site for important research into Indonesia’s LGBTQ+ community. Although it was beyond the scope of my thesis, my own data suggests that women’s attitudes towards sexuality broadly, including the LGBTQ+ community, shifted in the context of transnationalism given their exposure to different ideals and norms around queer politics and the fluidity of gender and sexuality. Liberal gender and sexual politics dominate on the university campuses in which these women were embedded, and many spoke of the initial shock, and burgeoning acceptance and understanding, they developed as they were exposed to homosexual couples and public displays of intimacy, gender-fluid individuals, and gender politics on campus and within the liberal urban centre of Melbourne. How these attitudes translate, or not, into action as they return home would be an important area of inquiry for speaking to the impact of transnationalism on support for the LGBTQ+ rights movement in
Indonesia. Further, my research respondents all self-identified as heterosexual, but it would important and interesting to explore the impacts of transnationalism on LGBTQ+ Indonesians traveling abroad for educational and economic opportunities, especially now, in light of the criminal code revisions and increasing violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Indonesia.

Finally, given the current rise of dating apps usage worldwide, including in Indonesia (Chalkley 2016), future research might build on existing scholarship about courtship, sex, and sexuality in contemporary Indonesia, as well as my findings, to investigate the role of digital infrastructures in contemporary dating practices in Indonesia. The significance of digital communications, specifically media and social media, to sexuality is well-documented in current scholarship (cf. Hearn 2006), but this area of research is neglected in literature on sexuality in Indonesia. Each of these areas of inquiry could have important implications for understanding the future of Indonesia regarding the rights, freedoms, and politics of women across the archipelago, particularly amidst the current and increasing conservativism in the country. Broadly, this research is part of a larger conversation to promote women’s voices and support personal and sexual agency and rights.
Bibliography


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Appendix 1: Respondent Recruitment Poster

If you are a female, born in Indonesia, and are currently an international student in Melbourne…

I would like to interview you as part of a study about Indonesian women’s experiences as students on Australian campuses around gender, sexuality, intimacy, transnationalism, communications and social relations in Australia. The interview takes about 1.5 hours and can be done at a time and location of your choosing.

Interested in participating? Have questions?

Please contact Alexandra Lloyd:
Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled ‘Overseas Female Indonesian Students & Sexuality: An Exploratory Case Study’ that is being conducted by Alexandra Lloyd. Alexandra is a graduate student in the department of Anthropology at the University of Victoria in BC, Canada. As a graduate student, she is required to conduct research as part of a master’s degree in Anthropology. You may contact her if you have further questions by email or by phone. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Leslie Butt. You may also contact her supervisor by email.

This research is being funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Scholarship program, the Center for Asia Pacific Initiatives at the University of Victoria, and the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria.

Purpose and Objectives
The purpose of this research project is to explore female Indonesian international students’ experiences of and perspectives on migration, life as an international student, campus sexual culture, gender, sexuality and dating, cultural expectations both from home and from Australia, and social relations in Melbourne.

Importance of Research
This research is important because it will make your voices heard on aspects of life as a woman and as an international student that may be important to you or have received little attention. Your participation is important for understanding the lives of contemporary female students overseas.

Participants Selection
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a female Indonesian international student over the age of 18, unmarried, living in and studying at a higher-level institution in Melbourne, Australia.

☐ Tick if consent form is for Interview #1. What is involved?
If you consent to participate in this research, your participation will include an interview that will last between 1 and 1.5 hours, where I will ask you about your experiences of and perspectives on migration, life as an international student, campus sexual culture, gender, sexuality and dating, cultural expectations both from home and from Australia, and social relations in Melbourne.

☐ Tick if consent form is for Interview #2. What is involved?
If you would like to participate in a photo elicitation project in a secondary interview, I ask that you take or bring in pictures that you think reflect your experiences of life as an international student, campus sexual culture, and cultural expectations around sexuality and gender. These can include photos of yourself, places, etc. I would like to cooperatively discuss the photos with you during the interview.

☐ Tick if consent form is for Participant Observation. What is involved?
If you participate in the third component of this project, I will join you for up to 3 periods
of observation and participation in your everyday life activities concerning being an international student or migrant. These periods of observation might be during campus or community organization events, or a gathering or celebration with friends or other international students. This participation will allow me to learn more about your everyday experiences in Melbourne. You can decide when, where and for how long I may participate and observe in your activities.

**Inconvenience**
Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you by taking time out of your schedule to conduct interviews. Additionally, it may inconvenience you to include me in your daily activities or spend time taking photos for a secondary interview.

**Risks**
Discussing your experiences might be emotional or uncomfortable for some people. If you feel uncomfortable we can take a break, skip a question, reschedule, or end the research activity at any time. You do not need to complete the interview.

**Compensation**
As a way to compensate you for your time and for any inconvenience related to your participation, I will purchase a small meal or non-alcoholic drink valued at up to $15.00 CAD over the course of the interviews. If you additionally agree to participate in participant observation activities, I will provide a gift card as honorarium for your participation in both interviews and participant observation, valued at up at $35.00 CAD.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without consequence or explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher to use the data when you withdraw. If you want to withdraw data after it has been collected I will remove and destroy that data.

**Anonymity**
To protect your identity, I will use pseudonyms when analyzing and disseminating the data. I will generalize or change details about identifying information such as locations, employers, and family. Photos used strictly for analysis will only be seen by the researcher, and general themes and findings will be interpreted from the data. No identifiable characteristics will be disseminated in the results, only generalized themes and findings. Any photos that you provide me with may be disseminated (published with results) only if you give me permission. You will have the right to say which photos of you may or may not be used in the dissemination of the results. I will ask your permission through email for each photo of you that you provide me with if I decide to publish the results. Photos that include other people may be used in analysis for general themes but will not be disseminated. If you strongly believe a photo featuring third-party individuals should be disseminated, the individuals must sign a photo release form that I will provide.

**Confidentiality**
Everything you tell me will remain confidential. I will generalize identifying information about you so that you cannot be personally identified in this research. This will be guaranteed by changing your name and all identifiable features in the data. If you give me permission to disseminate photos that you have provided me with that include yourself, you may be recognizable in the photos even when pseudonyms are used. Otherwise, you
will not be identifiable in the results. Photos with third parties will only be disseminated with explicit permission from the third party, via a photo release form I will provide.

**Dissemination of Results**
The results of this study will be presented to my university department as a thesis, which they will publish online through their library system. This research will also be used in a report to be distributed through the Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives at my university. In presentations and publications, I might include a quotation from your interview, an observation, or photos. Personal details will be changed so that while you may recognize yourself, it is highly unlikely that others would be able to do so. If you provide photos of yourself to me and you have indicated that you allow them to be published, I will generalize all information about you when referring to the photo(s) and I will not include your real name. If you indicate that you allow your photos to be published, your face will be digitally altered to protect your identity. You can receive an online link to the thesis when it is completed.

**Disposal of Data**
I will store all interviews on a password encrypted computer and external hard drive. No information about you will be made public. Data from this study will be disposed of once I have completed my thesis project and published results from it. All computer files and paper copies of the data, including photos, will be deleted and destroyed within 5 years of this research.

**Questions about the Study**
In addition to my supervisor and I, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria.

**CONSENT**
- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Alexandra Lloyd from the University of Victoria
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

☐ **Tick if consent form is for Interview #1:**
Your signature in the first line below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and consent to participate in this research project.

Signature: _________________________ Participant Name: _________________________
Date: __________
1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.          Yes _________
   No_________
2. I would like to receive a summary of the study’s results. Yes _________
   No_________

Please send them to this email address ____________________________________
Or to this mailing address:

________________________________________________
_________________________________________________

☐ Tick if consent form is for Interview #2:

Your signature in the first line below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and consent to participate in this research project.

Signature: ________________________  Participant Name: _______________________

Date: __________

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.     Yes ________     No ________

2. **Photo Elicitation Component:** Participant to provide initials, if you consent:

   Photos I provide to the researcher that do not include people may be used for:
   - Analysis: ________  Dissemination: ________

   Photos of myself that I provide to the researcher may be used for:
   - Analysis: ________  Dissemination (the researcher will ask permission for each photo): ________

   Photos I provide to the researcher that include other people may be used for:
   - Analysis: ________

☐ Tick if consent form is for Participant Observation:

Your signature in the first line below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and consent to participate in this research project.

Signature: ________________________  Participant Name: _______________________

Date: __________

Sign above if the researcher has provided honorarium (gift card valued up to $35.00) for your participation in interviews and participant observation, to be distributed at the end of the first participatory activity.

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.
Appendix 3: Interview Questions

1. Background information
   - Can you tell me a bit about yourself? — How old are you? Where are you from? How do you describe yourself in terms of religion & ethnicity?
   - How long have you been in Australia? What are you studying? What year are you? (For PhD/postgrads, ask about where they did their undergrad/MA). Can you tell me a bit about your research, reasons for choosing this subject?
   - What made you choose to study in Australia? Probe for funding/impetus. Are you enjoying your program and time spent here thus far?
   - Where are you living in Melbourne, and who do you live with? How was that arranged?

2. Life as an international student & migration experience
   - I’m interested in learning more about your experiences as an international student (FIIS). Can we start with you telling me a bit about your experience as an international student and your overall experience of migration in coming to Melbourne?
   - How does Australia differ, and how is it similar, to your community(s) back home?
   - How have your experiences as an international student changed at all from the time you arrived to now?
   - Can you tell me more about your life back home in [insert location]? What’s it like there? Were you in school there, too? Were you working? Probe.

3. Social relationships and transnational communications
   - What kinds of communication networks do you use in your everyday life (for example, texting, Facebook, Skype)? Are they important to you? Why? Can you tell me about who you contact with which media platforms? *Mapping polymedia*
     - How often do you speak to your friends and family back home? What media do you use to do so?
     - Creating/maintaining social networks both in Australia & back home? Anything new in Oz? What kind of relationships are being formed? How does social media usage & the relationships being formed, differ between the two countries?
   - How does your status as an international student impact how you interact with others in the community? Can you tell me more about this? Provide example.
   - Can you tell me about the social relationships you have developed and established here in Australia? What is your friend group like? How did you meet them?
     - How do your relationships and the activities you do together impact your sense of belonging here in Australia? How do you feel you are connecting with the community here?
   - Do you, or would you, use dating apps here in Australia? Can you tell me about those experiences?

4. Cultural expectations around gender, sexuality, and courtship
   - Can you tell me about your family? Probe about values & expectations. What is your opinion of your family’s views on dating and marriage?
   - What concerns does your family have about you living in Australia? How do they express their concern to you about dating, sexuality, etc. in Australia? Give me an example?
     - What technologies do they use to stay in touch with you on this? Probe for who participant is closest to, how relations might differ depending on kinship relationship (can include fears and immorality, can include encouragement to
date and marry Australian, can be about religion, class, education levels, timing, career). Probe.

- What role does your family, or specific family members, play in managing your sexual/romantic relationships? How do you get around this? Can you give me examples?
- Building on these ideas of expectations and values, what about those of your cultural community? What about your government? [Values & expectations around gender, sexuality, marriage, LGBT, etc.] How do you feel about this?
  - What is your opinion of the increasing government prohibition of LGBT communities? Additionally, what about increased surveillance of women & female sexuality? (Perhaps related to some of the turbulence around religion & politics in Indonesia right now)
- What does it mean to be a ‘good woman’ or a ‘bad woman’ back home? How are these distinguished (for example, how do you know whose good or bad in these ways)? Who decides this? Do you agree, and how do you feel about these ideas/expectations?
  - How do you feel these values/expectations/policies personally affect you or others in your life? Probe for each level – family, culture, nation
- How do expectations around women’s behaviours and values differ or share commonalities between Indonesia and Australia?
  - How do expectations from home travel with you? How are they maintained?
  - How do expectations placed on you at home and in Australia differ? What kinds of expectations impact you the most, in/from both locations? Do you feel you can or have left stricter expectations from home behind in coming to Australia? Probe.
- With the increasing numbers of women migrating out of Indonesia for education and professional experience abroad, do you think there may be shifts to this part of Indonesian society in the future? Change in the political, social, & economic landscape?

5. Dating, romance, gender and sexuality, and the campus environment

- Do you ever feel that your involvement in social and personal networks (both real and virtual) impact your sexuality, desires, romantic interests, or behaviours? Do the cultural differences make you feel differently about your romantic interests, desires, sexuality, gender roles, or behaviours?
  - For example, do you find that you are dressing differently? What about the beauty products you use, if any? Can you give me some examples? Why do you choose these products, clothes, etc.?
- Can you tell me more about what dating/courtship practices are like for young adults back home? How do they differ from what you have seen here in Australia?
- Do you feel comfortable exploring dating, relationships and intimacy here in Australia, or only back home? How has being in Australia changed your dating? Can you tell me about your dating experiences?
  - What, about your dating life, do you tell your family at home and what do you keep to yourself? How do you conceptualize these distinctions (tell and don’t tell)? How do you feel about this?
- How do you feel about intercultural relationships, for example, between Indonesian women and Australian men during this stage in your life? Would you date a man that isn’t Indonesian? How would your family or community feel about that if you did? Do you have any stories, your own or others, about coming to study here and having intercultural or interracial relationships?
Can you tell me about your ideas and experiences around love? Have you ever been in love? Is love the same as romance? What is love for you? Can you tell me about your experiences with romance? How are feelings of love and romance affected by where you are? Can you tell me about how things differ at home? What did you have to do and what do you have to do now to be in a relationship? Are there any stories you’d like to share or examples you’d like to give?

What are your feelings about marriage for yourself? Do you want to get married? Do you have plans? How do you imagine your future marriage? How close is this to at home ideals or Australian ideals? Opinions of marriage and conditions for marriage?

How do you feel about premarital sexual relationships? What are the cultural norms around this both at home and here?

What challenges have you faced as far as dating, desire, and sexuality back home? And here? Can you tell me more about those? How have they shaped your perception about Indonesia or Australia?

How do the people in your life here that you spend time with engage with your romantic or sexual life? How do they express their concern to you about dating, sexuality, etc.? What influence do they have, or try to have, on your romantic life? What kinds of technologies and communication methods do you use to stay in touch with them? Do you use these to talk about romance, dating, sexuality, etc.? Can you give me some examples? How do these individuals make you feel about dating, etc. in Australia? Probe for participant’s close network, and their role in this aspect of their personal lives (e.g. role of friends, lovers, suitors, etc.)

Would you be willing to show me an example of text messages, FB posts, etc. about these things? (Reminder of researcher’s confidentiality obligations!)

Now I’d like to ask you a few questions about campus life and in particular about your responses to the range of ideas about sexuality and gender that you have observed here on campus:

I’m interested in your response to messages about sexuality and sexual health on campus. What campus events or activities that are related to sexuality or sexual health have you noticed? What events have you attended? How do you feel about these kinds of public events? How do they contrast with campus or school events around sexuality in Indonesia? Probe for examples.

Orientation week events & tables from a variety of organizations (LGBT, reproductive health services, etc. response.

What about imagery and subject matter of campus publications or posters you see displayed around campus that may be related to sexuality, gender, ID politics, LGBT, sexual health, related to race/ethnicity/nationality, etc.

Protests on campus? Rallies for action? Any organized student movements that you have noticed or been aware of?

How do you feel about sexuality and gender relationships specifically in terms of the campus environment?

As an international student, how do you feel you are expected to behave?

Can you tell me about a time when you have been made to feel uncomfortable here, as a woman or as a foreign student (for example, experiences related to sexuality, gender, race, or other parts of your identity?) Discrimination?

Can you tell me some of your positive experiences in this regard?
• Have you noticed anything particularly shocking or admirable about the university environment regarding sexuality, sexual health, or dating culture?
  o How have these impacted you (opinions or behaviours)? How do you feel you respond to these messages?
• What about your social networks and activities on campus? Do these individuals have an impact on your dating, courtship, sexuality, etc.? Can you give me an example? How do you stay connected to the campus environment or the people you’ve met on campus? Does this relate to sexuality, dating, etc.?

Now I just have a few questions about your knowledge of reproductive and sexual health services on campus or organized by the university:
• Can you identify campus-based/funded reproductive and sexual health services here? And how does this compare to access to sexual and reproductive health services on campuses or schools in Indonesia?
• Would you consider the services here inadequate, adequate or excessive? Probe for why. What about the services for unmarried women in Indonesia?
• Do you think you, or your friends (please remember you don’t have to use names of anyone), would use those kinds of services? Under what circumstances?
• How do you feel about birth control? How do you feel about BC and its distribution through sexual health services? What kinds of BC can you access from home? What kinds of BC circulates between the countries, through friends or relatives? Have you participated in this?
• If you have used reproductive health services, would you mind sharing a bit about your experience?
• What is missing in sexual/reproductive health services either on campus or specifically for international students? E.g. cultural competency in delivery?

Okay, we are just about done. For the last couple of questions, I would like to change direction here very briefly and talk a bit more about some of your hopes and goals:
• Can you tell me a bit about your aspirations for the future? Personal, professional, romantic?
• How does your choice to study abroad in Australia relate to these goals?
• Do you think you would like to stay in Australia? Return to Indonesia? Elsewhere? Why that place? Where do you see yourself in 10 years? Probe.

We’re done! That concludes today’s interview. Thank you so much for your time. Do you have any questions for me?