

## CHAPTER 5

### Media and Contested Interpretations of Female Sexuality

#### 5.1 *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*: the Introduction

During the fieldwork, *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* were two Thai television drama series concerned with women and youth sexuality that were popularly consumed and discussed among all research participants. Both of these series were debated throughout Thailand due to their controversial stories.

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

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



Figure 5.1 PR poster of *Dok Som See Thong* with a Caption  
 “*Being Under (Sexually) Lustful, She Will be Burned from Inside*”

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

*Hormones Wai Wa Woon* (Stress and Storm) was broadcasted weekly on Saturday at 10 p.m. between 18 May and 24 August 2013 via GMM One satellite channel, GMM One channel’s website, GMM One iOS application, and Youtube where each episode was

viewed more than one million times. The series portrayed the unique lifestyles of a group of middle-class Grade 11 schoolgirls and boys in urban Bangkok. The story of this series explored controversial issues among teenagers in modern Thai society such as youth sexual relationship in school, homosexuality, smoking, drinking, violence, unplanned pregnancies, and other issues of high school boys and girls. The series was mentioned all over the social media too. The Twitter hash tag #HormoneTheSeries dominated the Twitter airwaves every Saturday nights during its broadcast (Editorial, 2013).

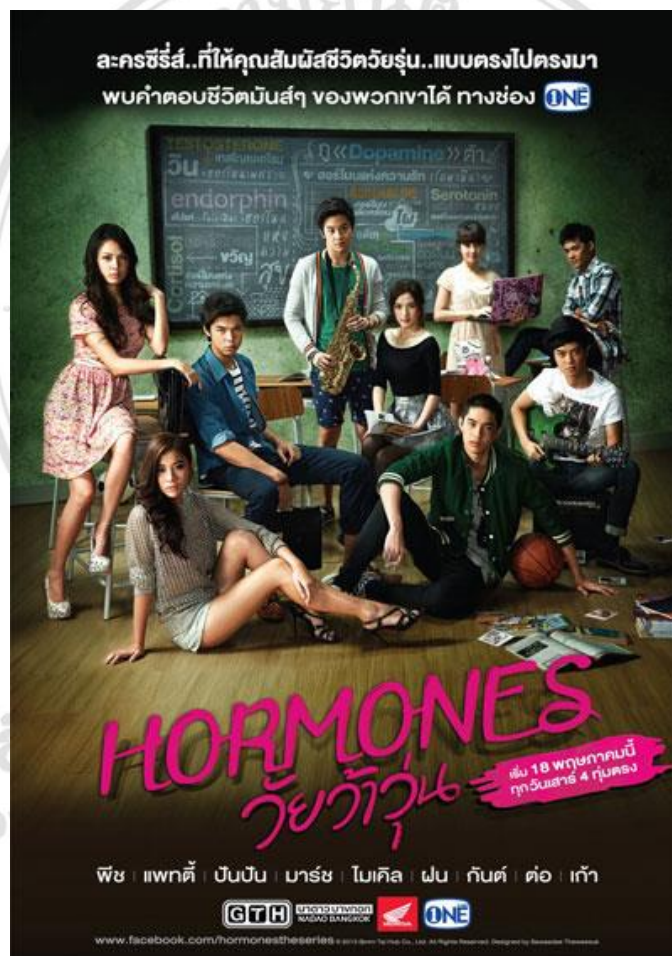


Figure 5.2 PR poster of *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*

Despite not being broadcasted via free television channels, the series was very popular and was wildly criticized in Thai society for its controversial content. Like the previous case of *Dok Som See Thong*, *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* received feedbacks that were mostly positive by younger audiences for its up-to-date storyline and production quality.

However, conservative viewers criticized the show for various scenes such as youth having sex, smoking, and bullying in school. As a result, the series producing team was summoned by the members of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications commission (NBTC) to be informed that those scenes would likely to violate the public morality and the Public Broadcasting Act. The show also led to a wide discussion in national level regarding sensitive issue about media censorship in Thailand. Despite the national level attention towards the series' content, the series was allowed to broadcast without being re-edited (Reporter, 2013).

In the following second and third parts of this Chapter, the stories of *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* are briefly elaborated respectively. The forth part explores the ways schoolgirls as the series audiences and fans, actively engaged with and talked about the series' texts to understand their interactions with the series' texts and the ways in which their sexual selves are constituted and expressed through their viewing practices and interpretations in their everyday lives.

### **5.2 *Dok Som See Thong*: the Brief Story**

*Dok Som See Thong* is a Thai television drama portraying a life story of Reya, a sexual liberated and ambitious young woman who was born in a working class family. Her father was an Indian security guard who had died before she was born. Her mother was a servant in a wealthy family whose owner was a Sino-Thai millionaire with five wives. Since she was a little girl, Reya was under the environments dominated by absolute patriarchy where males were acknowledged as leaders of the family and breadwinners, but women were relegated as housewives and were expected to be responsible for household chores. Reya had a very difficult time in her childhood due to her poor background. She was teased by the people who belonged to the higher class for being unattractive and belonging to the lower class. She was totally frustrated about her lower status and was looked down upon by the surrounding higher-class people.

After deciding to leave the Sino-Thai millionaire's house, Reya and her mother moved to work a for a middle-class Westerner family. Reya thus had a great opportunity to learn English until she could speak perfectly. She also learned Western manners such as dining and dressing in the Western style; still, Reya was not satisfied with the servant

status of her mother which always made her feel inferior. Reya always dreamed of raising her status to be part of the higher society. When Reya grew up, she became beautiful and sexually attractive. Driven from a high ambition, she became an airhostess as she always wished. Despite her lack of a college degree, she accomplished this feat by using her beauty, female sexuality, and middle-class habits inherited from the middle-class Westerner family her mother was working for. She was willing to be a minor wife of Sintorn, the director of human resource department of Siam Airlines, in exchange with the flight attendant position.

Soon afterwards, their relationship was discovered by Denchan, Sintorn's wife. They were forced to break up by Denchan since Sintorn's financial status was depended on his wife. Denchan also ordered Sintorn to end Reya's employment as an airhostess position in the Siam Airlines. After they broke up, Sintorn gave Reya a huge amount of money and she was hired to work for a bigger international airline company.

While working for the new airline, Reya met a new man, Kongkiet, who was a passenger on a Bangkok-Auckland flight that she was working. Although she discovered that Kongkiet was married, Reya worked to become his minor wife after she discovered that Kongkiet was the eldest son in a millionaire family. Reya's succeeded after she got pregnant and bore a son for Kongkiet while his wife, Naruedee, could not despite her tireless efforts for years.

Reya resigned from the airline requiring Kongkiet to fully support her as another legitimized wife. Kongkiet was very glad to have a son; still, it was a huge burden for him to keep everything hidden from his wife and his clan since he realized that they would not accept his actions. Kongkiet decided to bring Reya to deliver the baby and stay in Auckland.

After the baby was born, despite boredom, Reya enjoyed her luxurious life in Auckland. In Auckland she met C.K., a handsome Thai psychiatrist, in a golf club. Both of them fell deeply in love. One day, Reya decided to bring her baby back to Bangkok and leave him at Kongkiet's place since C.K. insisted that Reya had to be free from Kongkiet and her son before starting her new life with him.

After Reya successfully left her son for Kongkiet as she promised, Reya went to meet C.K. at his house in Bangkok hoping that she would start her new life with the right man who she truly loved. It turned out that C.K.'s place was the house that Reya's mother had worked for since she was young. C.K. turned out to be Kongkiet's younger brother who had looked down and made fun of Reya when they were children. C.K. revealed that he did not love Reya at all. He pretended to fall in love with Reya to prove that Reya was not a good wife and mother since she had multiple sexual relationships and left her own son. Finally, Reya left the house losing everything, especially Kongkiet, her son, and C.K.

Unlike other Thai television dramas, at the end of the last episode, the four minute dharma teaching by V.Vajiramedhi, regarding the ways to be literalized in watching the controversial *Dok Som See Thong* was broadcasted. He taught the audience that:

*“The Lord Buddha said that the one who has wisdom has to know the ways to search for wisdom from things that ordinary people could not do. A simple principle is that a good thing has a bad aspect; a bad thing had a good aspect. Therefore, despite the good and bad aspects of the series, audiences are required to watch in an appropriate manner. For example, in Dok Som See Thong, Reya was unkind to her mother. If we watch in a shallow manner, we would misunderstand that this girl is aggressive towards her mother. But if we watch critically, we could understand that she had been spoiled and loved too much by her mother. Reya thus was not respectful, and her mother became a servant for her own daughter. If we watch in this manner, we would learn the wrong model of motherhood that could be adapted in the ways we raise our children.*

*When we analyze further that why Reya hunted various men from the start to the end because she was heavily bullied and exploited when she was a little girl; she thus struggled to lift up her status by naming herself Fah [Sky] wishing that she could escape from being treated badly. Unfortunately, Reya did not prioritize her studying. She wore uniforms, but never entered the university gate. As a result, she did*



*not have knowledge. This is the story that we could take as a lesson learned for our children that if they do not focus on their studies, their future will be ruined like this. There are several aspects that we can take to teach our children.*

*We can learn dharma if we watch this television drama critically. If we do not, we will see only bad examples. The principal is while watching dramas we should be reflexive to ourselves too. Therefore, we could see that badness has its origin; goodness has its reason. When we watch critically, we would see that through watching a drama and being reflexive about ourselves, we could learn several lessons. Although the story which other people say it is inappropriate, we could see dharma if we know how to watch it critically.*

*Black exists when we know what white is; white is obvious when there is black. We have to be ready to accept the world from the both sides, so we would be vaccinated. If we know only good people, we could not know what the other is up to, you never could. We have to learn both good and bad sides.*

*We learn a good thing as a role model and a bad thing as a lesson learned. This is what we should gain from the series Dok Som See Thong.”*

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### **5.3 *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*: The Brief Story**

*Hormones Wai Wa Woon* is comprised of thirteen episodes. The story runs according to each episode title that indicates the main theme of that particular episode.

#### Episode 1: Testosterone (Male Hormone)

This episode introduced the main characters who were high school students studying in grade 11 of Nadao Bangkok High School. The story began with Kwan, a role-model female student who was seen as the perfect girl by her friends and teachers; Dao, an innocent dreamy girl who loved to write love story novels on her online web blog; Phu, a saxophonist in the school band who confused about his sexual orientation; Win, the most popular boy in the school with high self-confidence; Phai, a hot-tempered boy who always got involved in fighting; Sprite, a beautiful and sexually liberated girl; Tar, a boy with his passion for the guitar; Hmorg, an arty and self-preserved boy who was obsessed with a film photography; and Toei, a pretty and friendly girl who had more male friends than girlfriends.

The story began with Win and Sprite secretly had a sexual relationship in the school toilet. Unfortunately, Phai unintentionally witnessed the situation; but he kept it a secret. Due to having high self-confidence, Win questioned the school's strict regulations, especially regarding hair styles and school uniforms. He challenged the rules by not wearing the school uniform during a school day. The next day, several others followed Win's action. Kru Or, an English teacher, provided them an explanation and after they were satisfied until they resumed wearing the school uniforms.

#### Episode 2: Dopamine 1 (Hormone of Love)

After Tar uploaded his new cover song on Youtube, he became popular. Then, he was invited to be a new guitarist for See Scape, the most popular band in the school. After his performance in the school annual event, he confessed to Toei, who always sat next to him in a classroom, that he did it to express his affection toward her. Unfortunately, Toei refused his advances. Meanwhile, several situations happened during the school event; Sprite was about to have a sexual relationship with a younger male student, but



he did not have a condom; Phu developed his relationship with Tee, a male member of the school band.

#### Episode 3: Endorphin (Hormone of Happiness)

A sexual relationship between Sprite and a younger male student became a talk-of-the-town when “VR Source”, an independent Internet program led by the students, interviewed students who accidentally witnessed the situation. Meanwhile, Sprite was approached by a male student from another school. Phai intervened and resulted in series of fighting between boys from two schools. This situation brought Sprite and Phai closer together and they ended up with having a sexual relationship.

#### Episode 4: Serotonin (Hormone of Calmness)

Hmorg’s obsession with photography and artistic endeavors makes his girlfriend jealous because he did not pay her enough attention. She then decided to leave him and get a new boyfriend. At the same time, the relationship between Phai and Sprite was frowned upon among friends. After drinking with the school band members, Phu brought his drunken boyfriend to stay overnight at his place and they reached the peak of their relationship in Phu’s bed.

#### Episode 5: Estrogen (Female Hormone)

Since Toei got along better with male friends rather than girls, many of female classmates expressed their jealousy towards her. One day, the word “SLUT” was written on her table by an anonymous friend. Meanwhile, Win left his latest girlfriend and turned to Toei by giving her a flower in front of other students. Win’s ex-girlfriend was very angry. The ex-girlfriend and her friends bullied Toei in a toilet and posted the video clip on social media.

#### Episode 6: Dopamine 2 (Hormone of Love)

After Toei was bullied, Phu volunteered to help her by accompanying her to make Toei felt better. Associating with Toei made Phu confused about whether he liked male or female. He finally decided to break up with his boyfriend wishing that he could establish a new relationship with Toei, but it turned out that Toei refused his offer. At

the same time, Dao was falling in love with a male student from another school at an afterschool English tutoring class.

#### Episode 7: Adrenaline (Hormone of Aggression)

Since Win and Sprite had a sexual relationship before, Phai was often jealous of Sprite although she tried to be emotionally distance from Win. After a series of arguments, Phai released his anger by searching for fights with male students from other schools. The situation went too far when Phai's rivals threw a stone into his home in the middle of the night and severely injured his sister. Phai followed a monk's suggestion by ordaining and staying in a temple, but he was still attacked within the monastery.

#### Episode 8: Progesterone (Hormone of Motherhood)

Dao's strict mother tried to get to know her daughter's boyfriend and found out that he was from a high profile family. After this discovery, she allowed them to hang out together. One night Dao's boyfriend secretly climbed into the house and into her bedroom in the middle of the night. They had an unexpected sexual relationship without any protection and he totally disappeared afterwards. Due to lack of proper knowledge and experience, Dao decided to buy emergency contraceptive pills by herself and was cruelly criticized by a pharmacist. She also went to an illegal clinic for an abortion, but she ran away due to the brutal environment of the clinic. Despite this, Dao was very fortunate that her menstruation came within the period of time indicated on the label of emergency contraceptive pills meaning she was not pregnant.

#### Episode 9: Cortisol (Hormone of Stress)

Win tried to approach Kwan, the most perfect girl in the class, but she did not seem to show her interest in return. Since Win held Kwan's ultimate unknown secret, he thus attempted to be a hero by creating a scenario to let Kwan discover the truth that her father had another family and her mother was a minor wife. This life-long unknown truth changed the way Kwan thought about herself. She felt humiliated and was furious towards Win.

#### Episode 10: Testosterone VS Estrogen1 (Hormone of Male VS Female)

The truth about Kwan's family distracted her from studying for exams. She was always an A student and was ambitious to maintain her 4.00 GPA as well as a 'role model' image. However, Kwan made a huge mistake by cheating the exam and was caught by teachers. After that situation, Kwan became the talk-of-the-town; every student gossiped about her. Win was the one who tried to protect Kwan from negative rumors and he wished he could take back his failed attempts to help her.

#### Episode 11: Oxytocin (Hormones of Relationships)

During a long period of school vacation, Tar wrote a new song expressing his feelings toward Toei. Since Phu had lost both his boyfriend and girlfriend in the same time, he took time to reflect on his confusion and consult with his mother; but still, he did not find an answer for himself. Meanwhile, feeling hopeless about recovering his relationship with Kwan, Win became a party animal to try and forget his guilt. He hung out every night, drank heavily, and had multiple sexual relationships. Sprite's mother had an unexpected pregnancy with an anonymous man and delivered a baby. Since Sprite and her mother were sexually liberated, they were delighted to have a new family member despite not adhering to the typical form of family.

#### Episode 12: Growth Hormones (Hormone of Growth)

After the school vacation, every student came back for the second semester. See Scape was invited to perform at the Big Mountain Festival—Thailand's biggest annual concert event—with other popular bands and singers. Tar and everyone were excited about this great news. Phu did not want to lose his boyfriend, so he tried to reconcile by asking him to be friends. During the first school day, Kru Or organized a special English conversation class at her place after school. Win and his friends brought alcohol to drink at Kru Or's place and he was drunk after the class. Being under the influence of alcohol, he tried to have sexual relationship with Kru Or. Unfortunately, one student recorded a video clip and posted in a social media. Kru Or was investigated by the school administrative board and she decided to leave the school.

### Episode13: Hormones Efflux

Win's mistake with Kru Or had a huge impact to his life. His parents were informed by the school and he was punished by temporarily expelled. Meanwhile, Tar was very excited and rehearsed very hard for his concert. On the concert day organized at Khao Yai National Park far from Bangkok, everyone attended the concert together. Since Dao's mother was very strict, she lied to her mother that she would stay overnight at her friend's place to work on a group report. The final scene was at the Big Mountain Music festival where their friendships shined at the Khao Yai National Park. This indicated that this group of young women and men would be hormonally challenged further in the next chapters of life through which they would explore and gain new experiences together.

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

As mentioned, audience anthropology provides techniques for researchers to enter the consumption practices of media and popular culture to participate, observe, and then describe the ways in which it makes sense for those within it (Hinviman, 1999). Therefore, audiences are recognized as active consumers rather than passive recipients (Hall, 1997). To understand the schoolgirls' active interpretations of their television series viewing, audience anthropology reveals the ways schoolgirls—who are subordinated and marginalized by the conventional sexual discourse and patriarchy of Thai society—are not passive victims. Instead, they are active television drama consumers who are constantly re-appropriating or resisting the media texts by giving them their own meanings (de Certeau, 1988; Fiske, 1989; Friske, 1989). The data of this part was collected from participating in informal conversations among research participants as well as involving in their social media secret groups over a long period of time. Concerning the audience interpretations, especially the television drama viewing among women, positioning and the gender of the researcher is obviously crucial (Hobson, 1982). In addition to the way I positioned myself as an openly gay man and one member of the girl group as mentioned in Chapter 1, becoming a fan of both *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* like them greatly contributed to confidence among the research participants who expressed their experiences, pleasures,

interpretations, or critiques toward the series to me as another friend in a relatively open way.

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

According to Van Fleet's study of the female television drama series (*la korn nam now*) viewers in urban Chiang Mai, the characters of Thai television drama series refers to its recurring themes as much as the repetition of particular stories. There are certain thematic formulas, such as the happy ending, that audiences count on when watching dramas and these are as essential to viewing pleasure, as are a handsome hero and a beautiful heroine. These stock elements include a clear division between good and evil. They might also include such things as an unlikely match between lovers from different class backgrounds or outlandish twists of fate and fortune. Another important element is its exaggerated, bigger-than-life characters and dialogue. Music is also used to add a heightened sense of emotion and suspense to stories. Through its use of music and gestures, characters convey a heightened sense of emotion and through its radical polarization between the faces of good and evil (Van Fleet, 1998).

Meanwhile, through the process of consumption, Van Fleet found that television viewers have the opportunity to take what they see in the series and make it their own. In consumption lies the possibility of subversion and resistance, if even in small ways like homogenization and compliance (Van Fleet, 1998). In the case of schoolgirls in my study, their various interpretations of *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* also demonstrated how they actively interpreted popular television drama series in their

everyday lives, especially as the way of exploring and negotiating notions of female sexuality against the ideal type of young women of the *kunlasatree* model in contemporary northern Thai society.

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

From the conversation with the girls, I recognized what Reya said that: "*Female beauty has its price; I can exchange my beauty for anything I want.*" Research participants



actively interpreted the series storyline they had just watched and re-appropriated it to understand and criticize situations they faced in everyday life. The character ‘Sprite’, the sexually-liberated high schoolgirl in *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* also created a huge panic in Thai society. Many conservative audiences thought that Sprite was a “bad role model” for female youth because several scenes portrayed her having sex in a school uniform with many male students in the classroom and school toilet. The social trend expressed concern that female youth would imitate Sprite’s ‘inappropriate’ sexual behavior by having premarital sex which would lead to the spread of HIV/AIDS, other sexual transmitted diseases, or unwanted pregnancies.

In contrast to the social panic among adults, research participants expressed admiration toward Sprite; this contrasted with other characters that were publicly praised as well-behaved girls. Cindy opined that although most of her female friends did not have as many sexual acquaintances as Sprite had, this female character represented the sexual life style of many schoolgirls she knew. According to Cindy, this character is considered as being more ‘human’ than other characters. In celebrating female sexuality, Sprite realized that she was beautiful. Most of male students went after her because of her beauty. Knowing that, she utilized her beauty and her female sexuality as she wanted. Most of the research participants supported the way Cindy thought about Sprite. Nancy added that female beauty should be valued; Nancy felt that she was very fortunate to be born a woman. So far, she could utilize her beauty to earn extra money from being a *pretty* (product presenter), attending modeling contests, and even reviewing various beauty products for women to sell them online (more details in Chapter 7).

Meanwhile, Vicki insisted that by being a beautiful female, she could win several beauty queen competitions. After she was crowned a beauty queen, she had a busy schedule due to several social events and she said: *“If I wasn’t born a woman, I would never have a good life like this.”* Arguing against the controlling of her female sexuality, Nancy interestingly said that she believed that her beauty would not stay with her forever. Her beauty had a lot of value for her, but she really wondered why adults (especially teachers and parents) did not want her to be beautiful. So far they did everything to prevent her from being beautiful. In the meantime, Rose expressed her

satisfaction towards the scene where Sprite was about to have sex with a junior student in a science lab. However, she finally kicked him off refusing to have sex with him saying: “*I am also in the mood [for having sex with you]. But if you don’t have a condom, you will never do it*” which led to a very popular phrase widely circulated among young people that: “*If you want to drink Sprite, you must use a bag [condom]*” (ja kin Sprite tong sai thung). According to Rose, she always criticized of the scenes forbidding young people—especially female—from having sex since they contradicted her belief and sexual lifestyle. Being sexual-liberated, she especially admired the positive message of how young women could negotiate sexual practices by using condoms with male partners. Like Sprite, Rose assured me that she always practiced safe sex by using condoms appropriately every time she had a sexual relationship with her boyfriends. Rose compared Sprite to another character, Dao, who was over protected and always under a strictly parental control by her mother; being overprotected and not being prepared with sexual issues, Dao had an unexpected sexual relationship and had no idea how to protect herself.

The ways research participants interpreted *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* were to criticize conventional social norms regarding hegemonic female sexuality in Thai society. In the case of *Dok Som See Thong*, the character of Naruedee, a major wife of Reya’s second husband, was heavily criticized among them. Amy said that she saw enough of the stereotype of ‘well-behaved women’ in Thai television series where women were faithful to their husbands. Moreover, Thai television series repetitively portrayed ‘desirable’ woman characteristic as being submissive to any situations she faced. In the case of Naruedee, she chose to be quiet and let her husband have Reya as his minor wife without any argument. Amy said that: “*I was so annoyed with E-khun Dee [the way she called Naruedee’s nick name in an insulting way]. If I were her, I would never be stupid like that.*” Robin added that if she behaved like Naruedee in the series, she would lose her husband for sure. But in the series, it followed the conventional Thai drama storyline that Naruedee was born in an elite family. Her father was a consulate to Thailand in Paris. She was born in a high profile family and had a privilege compared to Reya. Meanwhile, Reya had to do everything to lift up her status from being a servant’s daughter who was constantly looked down by surrounding

people when she was a child. According to Amy, she said: “*If I behaved like Naruedee too much, I think I could not do anything for sure (mai thun dai dake).*”

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

In contrast, any woman who lost her virginity and had more than one sexual partner was ostracized and would never be forgiven. Rose, one of the sexually liberated research participants, also mentioned various scenes which, according to her, were not fair for women who were forced to preserve their virginity while men were allowed to enjoy sexual experiences. For example, Raya’s mother constantly taught her daughter that virginity was the ultimate woman’s value; if she lost her virginity, she would not be worthy enough to be a good woman. Meanwhile the first wife of Jao Sua taught her daughter-in-law that a woman’s ultimate value was to be an honest wife for her husband and a perfect mother for her children. Another heart-breaking character for Rose was Jao Sua’s fifth wife. Born and raised in America, she believed that all human beings

were the same, man or woman. Disagreeing, Jao Sua yelled at her that she was in Thai society and those rules no longer applied. According to this society, women were considered 'used' if they already had a sexual relationship. Disagreeing with Jao Sua's premise, she argued that if she was considered 'used', Jao Sua was also considered 'used' as well since he also had many sexual relationships. Jao Sua angrily replied by firmly insisting that in Thai society, men were superior to women and Thai men could have multiple sexual partners without being considered as 'used'. In contrast, women would be automatically labeled as being 'used' once they had their first sexual relationships. Among enthusiastic discussions regarding these scenes, Nancy concluded in her perspective that: "*That's why I prefer being a bian [lesbian]*" (as previously mentioned in Chapter 6, having sexual relationship with members of the same gender were not considered among research participants as 'losing a virginity' (*sia tua*) because it could not result in pregnancy)

While *Hormones Wai Wa Woon* was being aired, many research participants shared a satirical picture that criticized the series' storyline of portraying the double standard between Win, a main male character, and Sprite, a main female character. This picture originated from the Facebook public page "*Manee Mee Nom*" (Manee Who Has Big Breasts), was widely shared, and received many 'likes' from young fans. Many of them also criticized the double standard between male and female sexuality portrayed in the series. In the series, Win was a huge playboy in school. He could get any girls he wanted and had many sexual partners, including Sprite. From his actions, Win was acknowledged as an idol in the school. He was popular and desired by the schoolgirls. One scene a male junior student approached Win and said: "*You are my hero [as being a playboy].*" In contrast, Sprite was labeled by students in the school as a 'slut' (*rat*, a rhinoceros in Thai meaning, is a slang widely used to insult a woman who is sexually-spoiled) due to the way she was sexually liberated. Some of her girlfriends refused to continue their friendships with her. Once she was caught by other students for having sex with a junior male student in a science lab (which she refused to do so since the male student did not bring a condom at that time), Sprite became the subject of gossip from this situation. One of her previous boyfriends called her 'slut' when he found out that she had a sexual relationship with another male student. Many males then misunderstood that they could have sex with Sprite easily once she accepted a date with

them or even allowed them to send her home. Due to social pressure, Sprite finally realized that she was “unvalued” as she told her mother.

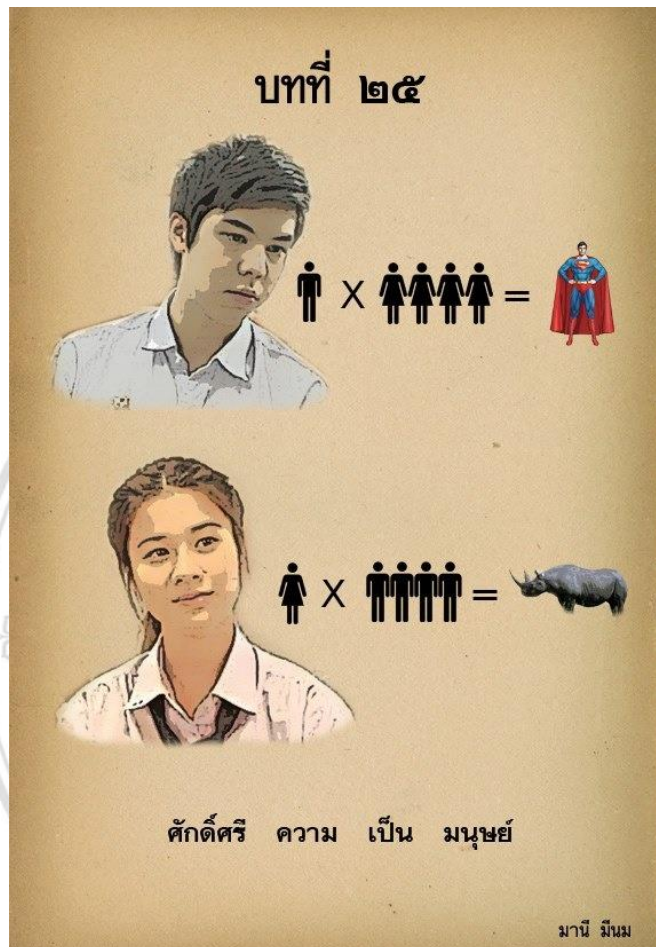


Figure 5.3 The parody picture criticizing the sexual double standard between male and female characters in *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*.

Several types of family and parenting style were also an important topic of conversation among the group members. They reflected on their own families and their parents' parenting styles by comparing to those families portrayed in *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*. Dao's and Sprite's families, which represented two opposite family types, were actively discussed by Kim, who was raised in a broken home but understanding single father. Rose, Emma, and Robin, who belonged to highly controlled families, also discussed these issues. In the series, Sprite's mother was a single mother. Her mother was very understanding and willing to listen to Sprite's problems. Especially concerning sexual issues, Sprite was provided a high level of freedom to have relationships with male

partners. In return, Sprite gave her mother a sexual freedom as well. They could talk to each other about anything, including their sexual activities and protection. According to Sprite, her mother perfectly played roles as her mother, father, and friend who she could wholeheartedly rely on. Sprite's good relationship with her mother led to high self-confidence and she never felt a lack of love or understanding from her mother. On the contrary, Dao was raised in a family in line with the conventional style of the 'perfect family.' She had both a father and mother who loved her and valued her education. Her mother drove her to the school and picked her up from extra tutorial classes after school no matter how late at night. Every night, her mother always brought her a glass of milk and gave her a good night kiss. Despite the appearance of perfection of Dao's family, she always felt that she was under the strictest parental control, especially by her mother. Her mother managed every detail of her life: what extra classes she should have studied, what kind of clothing she should have worn, what kind of friend she could spend time with, and even what time she should have gone to bed. When she had a friend of the opposite gender, that young male was closely inspected by her mother so that Dao was allowed to continue her friendship with that particular young man. Dao was both sexually attracted to the young man and strictly repressed by her mother. When Dao had an unexpected sexual experience, she did not know how to protect herself very well.

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

Even Sprite's family was not in line with the conventional style of family that consisted of a father and mother living together in harmony. According to Rose, she felt 'jealous' of Sprite for having an understanding mother who listened to her problems, despite an imperfection of her family. Rose reflected her feelings by saying that: *"perfection and happiness were totally different."* That meant although her family was perfect according



to the ideal family pattern, she was not happy since she was always under her parents' strict control. After that, Kim told me that after listening to Rose complained about her controlling family, Kim felt very fortunate to have an understanding father. Even though she was raised in a single-parent family and her father did not stay with her, at least her father always understood, trusted in her, and gave her a certain level of freedom. She was very comfortable talking about anything with her father. Unlike Kim, Rose was expected to behave in front of her parents in a manner that was totally different from the way she really did with friends. Since she was one of Rose's best friends, Kim assured that when Rose faced any problem in her life, her parents would be the last persons with whom she would choose to talk.

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

Another controversial scene was when Dao imagined that if she were pregnant, all of her friend would leave her and the school would force her to resign. Since pregnancy would also ruin the school's reputation, she would be expelled and her parents would be terribly disappointed. Dao therefore decided to go to an illegal abortion clinic. The series portrayed the abortion clinic a scary place with dreadful conditions. Dao saw a young woman undergoing an abortion before facing an excessive miscarriage and bleeding all over the clinic floor. Rose called this scene 'over' (exaggerated) arguing that a storyline of this episode was intended to frighten young people from sexual relationships by warning them that they would face these severe problems, which "It's not true" according to Rose and other research participants' perspectives. Disagreeing with the series, Rose shared her opinion that she knew some of her girlfriends who had unplanned pregnancies while they were in high schools and vocational schools. Most of those young women decided to terminate their pregnancy because they could not raise a child while studying. Those girls could find proper and safe medical services in private clinics and hospitals in Chiang Mai City. They could definitely come back to study like nothing had happened before. One of Rose's friends decided to continue her pregnancy despite being in grade twelve while being six months pregnant because she had a good supportive system at home. However, she was very unfortunate that her parents were invited to meet with school officials and the school 'politely asked her to resign from the school'. Those school officials claimed that they were concerned that her classmates would not accept their daughter because of her pregnancy. Very disappointed with the school decision, her parents, however, accepted the offer to expel her from the school. In contrast to the school's prediction, her friends rallied to her cause after they heard that the school had asked her to resign. Although teachers constantly used this girl as an example to teach other students that unplanned pregnancy while studying could ruin their future, all of her classmates continually went to visit her until she delivered her baby. On the delivering day, most of her classmates went to visit her to congratulate her and her new baby at the hospital. Despite being expelled when she was in grade twelve, after delivering her baby, the girl enrolled to study in non-formal education system and finally graduated high school at almost the same time as her friends. She then continued her study at a university and had outstanding grades. After telling this story, Rose expressed her opinion that each girl had her own way of

life. However, she was forced on to the only one path paved by adults. Anyone who refused to follow that path would be criticized and punished for being wrong and disobedient.

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

*“Who cares?”* Jill swore when I asked the group members how they thought about the censorship measure against *Dok Som See Thong* and *Hormones Wai Wa Woon*. *“No one cares about that television program classification system!”* According to research participants’ lifestyle, the measure of television program classification system did not have any effect on their television viewing behavior. In today’s world, youths rarely watched television programs in the living room together with their parents; they prefer watching television drama series via Youtube in their private spaces, especially in their bedrooms. *“It’s more private [watching series via Youtube in her bedroom]. I feel awkward while watching love scenes with my parents and my mother told me not to act like that”*: Robin stated. Emma added that: *“I haven’t watch TV with my parents for a long time. And we don’t take it [the television program classification system] seriously because no matter what classification it is, we will still watch it on Youtube anyway.”*

Regarding national debate on controversial content and various ‘inappropriate’ sexual scenes of two series, all research participants expressed their disagreement and wondered why adults were panic about these issues. Tina said: *“Why do they [adults] want to forbid us from knowing this stuff? I think the real situation is more than what they watched in the series.”* Kim added that: *“Why do they display captions warning us*

*that it's not appropriate for young people [drinking, smoking, having a sexual relationship, etc.]? They might think that when we see that caption, we would not do that stuff. The more they forbid us, the more we want to do it!"* Jill then shared her opinion that:

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

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

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## Conclusion

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

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