

Representations of Female Infidelity in the Netflix Series *Losmen Bu Broto*: A Content Analysis of Gender Roles and Family Conflict

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Abstract

This study aims to understand how men perceive the representation of unfaithful women in the Netflix series *Losmen Bu Broto*. Based on a constructivist paradigm, this research employed a qualitative descriptive method with Moustakas' phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with five male participants aged 18–25 who had watched the entire series. The findings reveal gender bias in assessing infidelity: although both men and women's unfaithfulness is judged as wrong, women are more severely condemned on moral and social grounds. This reflects the persistence of patriarchal culture that positions women as symbols of family honor. The study highlights how media not only represent but also reinforce unequal gender constructions through narrative and character depiction.

Keywords: gender representation, patriarchy, fidelity, phenomenology, *Losmen Bu Broto*

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed the media consumption patterns of Indonesian society, including the way audiences enjoy drama series, which are now widely accessible through streaming platforms such as Netflix. The serial format, as explained by Fossard (2005:28), enables the exploration of complex themes that are closely related to everyday life, including family issues and infidelity.

Along with the shift in the function of film from mere entertainment to a medium of social representation (Ushuluddin & Setyawan, 2025), themes of domestic conflict and fidelity have increasingly dominated Indonesian screens. Data from the IDN Research Institute (2024) and Kompas indicate that family drama is among the most popular genres because it is capable of fostering audience empathy toward everyday experiences (Haryanto, 2023). However, beneath this sense of empathy lies a gender representation that is far from neutral. Digital media provide opportunities for women to appear as independent and conflict-driven protagonists (Magielse, 2025; Nugroho, 2022), yet they are also frequently positioned as the source of domestic conflict, particularly in cases involving infidelity.

This representation cannot be separated from the influence of the patriarchal system that remains deeply embedded in Indonesian media culture. Various studies have shown that patriarchy in Indonesian films is reflected through narratives, characterizations, and visual portrayals that reinforce the subordination of women (Maharani, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2024; Nahda et al., 2024; Kania et al., 2023; Lisnawati, 2024). Media even shape gender stereotypes from an early age and consistently reproduce patriarchal norms (Muliawati, 2024; Damayanti, 2023; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

In the context of fidelity, patriarchy creates a double standard: violations committed by men are often tolerated, whereas women are judged more harshly (Boyce et al., 2016; Pichon et al., 2020). Women's fidelity is regarded as a symbol of family morality, while men's fidelity is often viewed as a matter of personal choice (Buss, 2018; Buunk & Dijkstra, 2004; Kato et al., 2021). Even within digital environments, women are more easily labeled as immoral (Adam, 2019; Alexopoulos, 2020).

Family background and personal experiences also shape perceptions of fidelity. Women who have experienced infidelity or who grew up in families with unfaithful fathers tend to develop more critical views toward fidelity (González-Rivera et al., 2020; Rokach & Chan, 2023). Meanwhile, men with manipulative and narcissistic personality traits are more likely to engage in infidelity (March et al., 2024), further reinforcing the relationship between patriarchy and infidelity-related behavior.

Within this context, the Netflix series *Losmen Bu Broto* serves as a relevant case study. The series portrays female characters as the center of family conflicts, including issues of infidelity. Although the narrative presents domestic relationships in a complex manner, male perceptions of female characters who engage in infidelity remain influenced by deeply rooted patriarchal constructions. Women are more quickly perceived as weak, guilty, and responsible for family breakdowns, demonstrating that media representations not only shape stories but also influence societal perceptions of gender and morality.

Therefore, the study of male perceptions toward female characters who engage in infidelity cannot be separated from the social and cultural structures reproduced through media. Series such as *Losmen Bu Broto* are not merely reflections of reality but also arenas in which patriarchal values continue to be negotiated and maintained.

METHOD

This study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as the result of individual constructions formed through interaction and experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A descriptive qualitative method was employed, as it is appropriate for exploring the subjective meanings of social phenomena (Moleong, 2017). Moustakas' phenomenological approach was selected to investigate the essence of male viewers' conscious experiences regarding the representation of women who engage in infidelity in the *Losmen Bu Broto* series (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas' phenomenology is a research approach that focuses on individuals' conscious experiences and seeks to uncover the essential meanings of those experiences through reflection and in-depth understanding (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants were selected purposively, consisting of males aged 18–25 years from diverse social backgrounds who had watched the domestic conflict scenes in the series (Sugiyono, 2019). In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, both online and face-to-face, allowing participants to express their views freely while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Moleong, 2017; Creswell, 2013). The interview process continued until data saturation was reached with the sixth participant, at which point responses began to recur and no new information emerged (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data were analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013), beginning with transcription, theme identification, classification, and interpretation of

meaning. The researcher sought to understand how male perceptions of female characters who engage in infidelity are shaped by personal experiences and socio-cultural constructions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of “Infidelity” According to Men

Textural

Agus: *“In my opinion, infidelity begins in the heart. It is usually visible when someone starts feeling more comfortable sharing stories or personal matters with another person rather than with their own partner. So even if there has been no physical action, if the feelings have already shifted, that is already considered infidelity.”*

Budi: *“For me, infidelity happens when attention and time start being directed toward someone else. It usually begins with chats or small habits that gradually become more intense. And in my view, that is already a form of cheating even if there is no physical involvement.”*

Robert: *“I think infidelity occurs when feelings are already directed toward another person. Whether there is physical contact or not, if the heart has shifted, then that is infidelity.”*

Anton: *“Infidelity is a betrayal that can hurt someone mentally. From the experiences of people around me, those who are cheated on can become stressed or even physically ill. So it is not only about physical actions but also about the emotional impact.”*

Axel: *“In my opinion, infidelity is more about feelings. What really hurts is when the heart changes, not the physical act itself.”*

Structural

The informants’ understanding of infidelity emerged from personal experiences, observations of relationships around them, and the values of emotion and trust that they uphold. They learned from real-life examples that infidelity does not appear suddenly but develops from emotional closeness that is not properly maintained. Their social environment and observations of the consequences of infidelity on others shaped their belief that infidelity begins when the heart changes.

Essence

The essential meaning of this theme is that infidelity is understood as a form of emotional betrayal. A shift of affection is considered more painful than a physical act and serves as the primary indicator of infidelity.

Male Perceptions of Women Who Engage in Infidelity

Textural

Agus: *“When women cheat, it is usually because they become emotionally involved. And once the feelings change, the consequences are much more serious. That is why it feels more painful.”*

Budi: *“In my opinion, when a woman cheats, it is a serious matter. Women rarely cheat just for fun. Usually, they have already developed feelings.”*

Robert: *“Women have a role in maintaining relationships. So when a woman cheats, society usually sees it as a major wrongdoing.”*

Anton: *“In many cases that I have seen, when a woman cheats, people immediately label her negatively. It simply appears more serious in the eyes of society.”*

Axel: *“In my view, a woman who cheats is someone who does not appreciate the sacrifices made by a man. Usually, men have already sacrificed a great deal.”*

Structural

The informants' perspectives were shaped by their observations of real-life examples in their surroundings and by the belief that women possess stronger emotional attachments. They viewed women as the party responsible for maintaining relationships; therefore, when women engage in infidelity, it is perceived as a more severe emotional violation. Social values internalized since childhood reinforced the perception that female infidelity has a deeper impact on relationships.

Essence

The essence of this theme is that women are perceived as having profound emotional attachments; therefore, female infidelity is considered more serious and more painful than male infidelity.

The Influence of Patriarchal Culture on Judgments of Infidelity

Textural

Agus: *“Since childhood, my mother told me that women must protect their honor. So I grew up viewing women as having greater moral responsibility.”*

Budi: *“My religious teacher once said that women are the reflection of the family. If that reflection is broken, many others will be affected. Because of that, I grew up believing that women must be especially careful.”*

Robert: *“The culture in which I grew up taught me that women should be protected, gentle, and faithful. Therefore, it seems natural that judgments toward women are harsher.”*

Anton: *“My mother always told me not to be involved with two people at the same time. That made me feel that women carry a greater moral burden in relationships.”*

Axel: *“In my family, women were expected to be obedient, while men were responsible for providing financially. Those values remain attached to the way I judge women today.”*

Structural

The informants' patterns of thought were shaped by patriarchal values that they had received since childhood through family teachings, religious instruction, and their social environment. This value system teaches that women are guardians of honor and fidelity and therefore should uphold higher moral standards. It is this patriarchal framework that leads them to judge female infidelity as worse than male infidelity.

Essence

The essence of this theme is that patriarchy serves as the foundation for evaluating women's behavior. Women are perceived as carrying greater moral responsibility; therefore, the same wrongdoing is considered more severe when committed by women.

Judgments Toward the Female Character Who Commits Infidelity in *Losmen Bu Broto*

Textural

Agus: *“The character is clearly wrong because she has a family that loves her but still chooses someone else.”*

Budi: *“It is obvious that she failed to control herself. As a woman, she should have thought more carefully.”*

Robert: *“Whatever the reason, cheating is still something that cannot be justified.”*

Anton: *“Because women are viewed as moral guardians, her actions immediately seem fatal.”*

Axel: *“If a man has already made sacrifices but is still betrayed, it simply feels unacceptable.”*

Structural

The way the informants evaluated the female character in the series was influenced by moral values and gender standards that had been deeply embedded within them since childhood. They did not merely assess the storyline but viewed women through a social role that requires them to maintain fidelity. Personal experiences and real-life examples in their surroundings made their judgments toward the female character considerably harsher.

Essence

The essence of this theme is that the female character is viewed as a violator of the norm of fidelity that binds women within patriarchal culture. The informants' judgments are

influenced more by cultural values than by the narrative context of the story.

The Impact of Female Infidelity on Male Perspectives

Textural

Agus: *“The most painful part is the betrayal. Trust is completely destroyed.”*

Budi: *“I have personally seen friends who were cheated on become unable to trust others again.”*

Robert: *“Infidelity destroys trust. That is what hurts the most.”*

Anton: *“Because I have been cheated on, I know that the trauma is severe and takes a long time to heal.”*

Axel: *“Men experience damage to both their self-esteem and emotions when they are betrayed.”*

Structural

The informants' perspectives were shaped by personal experiences and real-life cases they had witnessed. Some had personally experienced infidelity, while others had observed its impact on friends or family members. These experiences reinforced the belief that female infidelity causes deep emotional wounds, damages trust, and influences how men approach future relationships.

Essence

The essence of this theme is that female infidelity is perceived as highly damaging to men's trust and self-esteem. Its impact extends beyond the relationship itself and affects men's confidence and readiness to establish new relationships.

Results

The results of the phenomenological analysis involving five male informants indicate that patriarchal culture strongly influences the way they interpret female infidelity in *Losmen Bu Broto*. The informants perceived the essence of infidelity not as physical contact but as a “shift of affection,” which they regarded as the most serious form of emotional betrayal. They positioned women as the moral guardians of the family; therefore, when women engage in infidelity, it is viewed as a double violation, both on a personal level and against cultural norms.

Unconsciously, patriarchal values originating from family, religion, and the social environment shaped a double moral standard in which women were judged more harshly than men in similar situations. Their interpretations of the female character in the series were also influenced by masculine identity, as they tended to evaluate the character's actions through

the lens of masculine norms rather than through the narrative context of the story.

As a result, female infidelity was perceived as a threat to male self-esteem, generating feelings of insecurity and even trauma. This finding highlights a new contribution of the study, namely that female infidelity is understood not only as a moral violation but also as an experience that disrupts the masculine identity of young men.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that men's interpretations of women who engage in infidelity are strongly influenced by social constructions and patriarchal culture. This is consistent with the constructivist paradigm, which asserts that social reality is shaped through individual experiences, social interactions, and cultural values that individuals internalize.

Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach helped uncover the "essence of experience," namely how the five informants interpreted infidelity based on their life experiences, family teachings, religious values, and media representations.

The process of epoche enabled the researcher to suspend personal judgments, while transcendental reduction and imaginative variation facilitated the identification of the underlying structures of the informants' experiences.

Based on the overall findings, infidelity is not understood merely as a physical act but rather as a form of emotional betrayal that is considered far more painful. In the informants' perspectives, women are placed under higher moral standards than men. Therefore, when women engage in infidelity, the act is perceived as considerably more serious and less forgivable.

This perspective does not emerge spontaneously. Patriarchal culture appears to exert a strong influence on the informants' ways of thinking, both consciously and unconsciously. Traditional values that position women as the moral guardians of the family remain deeply rooted, leading to stricter judgments of women's behavior. This is also reflected in the way they interpreted the female character in *Losmen Bu Broto*. Rather than viewing her actions as part of the narrative dynamics of the story, the character was understood through a traditional moral framework that demands fidelity, patience, and obedience.

Female infidelity was also perceived as having greater psychological consequences for men. The informants described how such actions could undermine feelings of security, damage self-esteem, and leave emotional trauma that affects future relationships. Consequently, the narrative that emerges is not solely about infidelity itself but also about how gender norms and patriarchal culture shape the ways in which society evaluates and responds to it.

Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrate that perceptions of women who engage in infidelity are not merely the result of individual judgments but rather cultural constructions that have been inherited and reinforced through family, religion, and the media.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the representation of women who engage in infidelity in *Losmen Bu Broto* remains overshadowed by patriarchal values. In this series, women are portrayed as the party that bears the greatest moral burden when violations occur within a relationship, making female infidelity appear more serious and more disruptive to family harmony than male infidelity. Such portrayals demonstrate that the media often position women as the source of disorder when they are perceived to violate domestic norms. Furthermore, stereotypes attached to women, such as the obligation to preserve family honor and maintain fidelity as a moral identity, are strongly reflected in the series. This finding is consistent with studies suggesting that the media frequently construct women as moral symbols who must be protected and who are judged more harshly when they transgress boundaries established by society.

This study also finds that the media continue to reinforce patriarchal structures through the ways in which they portray emotions, conflicts, and consequences experienced by women in cases of infidelity. This finding is similar to previous studies indicating that digital media continue to reproduce gender hierarchies and place women in less advantageous positions. Therefore, the representation of women in *Losmen Bu Broto* as a whole demonstrates that gender bias remains dominant and that the media play an important role in maintaining such perspectives.

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