



# The divorcee memes in the virtual field: Body discourse positioning as the object and enhancement of sexual image

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## Abstract

This article aimed to explore the positioning of divorcee status in divorcee memes. The divorcee meme template spread over the internet was used as the focus of the study. The researchers selected the divorcee memes in 2018, 2019, and 2020, totalling nine memes. The selection of divorcee memes was carried out on views representing the body's discourse as the dominant discourse. We examined the main discourse that develops in divorcee's memes relating to the body. By combining qualitative and quantitative analysis ( $n = 45$  meme readers) based on Roland Barthes' theory, we examined the divorcee's position in the meme, the ideology attached to it, and the readers' views. Our findings showed the divorcee's position in the divorcee's meme as an object of gaze by using the body as the focus, thereby strengthening the stigma that divorcees are seductive women who always wait for men's presence. The entire divorcee meme showed the divorcee's position as a joke. However, from readers' responses, it can be concluded that the divorcee's meme is a myth that is built to perpetuate the negative stigma of divorcees. Finally, our findings suggest that internet users produce more critical and objective memes of empirical truth.

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## Introduction

The discourse on sexuality has experienced a shift towards hypersexuality, where the forms of sexual activity have developed far beyond the nature of sexuality itself. Discourses about the body also continue to grow through images and signs on the internet. Virtual bodies are also present on various websites that fulfil men's gaze satisfaction or male sensual gratification objects (Mulvey, 1974). The

power of female body images on the internet has proven to effectively get men's attention, especially for commercial blogs (Abidin & Thompson, 2012).

In Indonesia, divorcees are commonly associated with negative images, such as dependent beings, immoral, slandered as predatory, greedy and evil (Parker, 2016). The phenomenon of divorcee memes that appears on the internet is proof of how the media has strengthened the stigma and stereotypes about divorcees. This is due to the media's ability to build the masses, which becomes a mass society (McQuail, 2004). The use of various displays of divorcee memes on the internet and readers' responses to them shows that they can be relied on for exploitation because social media functions as a forum for socialisation (DeCook, 2018).

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The study of memes is interesting because in academic studies, according to Shifman (2013), memes are painful, but they are always presented for propaganda purposes in rumours, jokes that are spread through the website from one person to another. Thus, some researchers have conducted some studies related to memes. Beskow, Kumar and Carley (2020) and Lonnberg, Xiao and Wolfinger (2020) studied internet memes by analysing their growth and evolution from a political point of view and the reasons for their spread. Benaim (2018) did a study to analyse internet memes from an innovation study point of view. Ross and Rivers (2017) conducted a study to investigate Internet memes' visual-discursive features concerning U.S president candidates during the 2016 election. Williams, Oliver, Aumer and Meyers (2016) studied memes to determine people's perceptions of racial memes scattered on the internet.

Since no study had been conducted to study divorcee memes, this article aimed to position divorcee status in memes in a virtual field and map memes readers' views. Moreover, the essence of this study of the divorcee memes also aimed to uncover and understand visual objects, cultural practices, gender politics, including the involvement of institutions (patriarchal, state, socio-religious, education, etc.) products and the production of material objects.

## Literature Review

### Patriarchal Culture

Patriarchy is a concept that refers to political, social, and economic relations and institutions structured system of gender inequality (Nash, 2009). Culture can be defined as knowledge that people need to function in a particular situations (Mukhopadhyay, Karisiddaiah & Mukhopadhyay, 2018). Thus, patriarchal culture can be defined as knowledge that a specific community has to identify the different role of women and men. Patriarchal culture is closely related to gender role stereotypes (Cho & Jang, 2021).

### Feminism, Feminist Theory, and Sexual Objectification

Feminism is an intellectual and a political effort to identify, understand, and dismantle inequalities between men and women (Pollard, 2009). Feminists identify the interrelationship between gender and class within the spheres of production and reproduction (Nash, 2009). Feminist theorists believe that gender stratification is related to other forms of inequality –social class inequality, racism, heterosexism, ageism, and ableism – to produce qualitatively different life experiences and opportunities for various groups of women and men (Renzetti, 2008).

In feminist theory, men are considered as subjects, while women are the objects (Christianson, Teiler, & Eriksson, 2021). Many studies found that women are usually seen as a sexual object (Dvir, Kelly, Tyler, & Williams, 2020; Sáez, Alonso-Ferres, Garrido-Macías, Valor-Segura, & Expósito, 2019; Vaes, Cristoforetti, Ruzzante, Cogoni & Mazza, 2019). Sexual objectification is related to women's physical appearance, specifically their sexual features or functions (Chevallereau, Stinglhamber, Maurage & Demoulin, 2021). Sexist attitudes toward women has something to do with objectification and enjoyment (Lameiras-Fernández, Fiske, González Fernández & Lopez, 2018).

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## Methodology

The data came from divorcee memes' development over three years (2018, 2019 and 2020). Over the three years, the data were collected to determine the divorcee meme discourse movement in the virtual field. Data collection was carried out by following a strategy commonly used in digital ethnography, i.e. observation via digital devices and software (Pink et al., 2017). In this study, the researcher collected the data from the internet by using google search engine and specific keywords "*meme janda*", "*memes janda*", "*janda memes*", and "*janda meme*". Discourse content analysis was carried out following the steps of Barthes (1974) semiotics and Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) conception of symbolic violence. The first step taken was to collect blogs containing divorcee memes in 2018, 2019, and 2020. The blogs were selected using the snowball technique, then categorised based on their theme and content. The three blogs were guyonrech.blogspot.com, lifestyle.okezone.com, and richagambar.blogspot.com. The blogs were chosen because there were pictures of divorcee memes over the three years. The main consideration in choosing these blogs was because they had been posted and belonged to the public, so the space for freedom to play interpretations was wide open. By prioritising the media research code of ethics, internet users' comments are impersonated through anonymous use.

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## Results and Discussion

### Sexual Imagery on Divorcee Memes

Based on a search of the three blogs containing divorcee memes, it is understood that for three years (2018, 2019, 2020) from the distribution of signs, that the image in the meme shows that the divorcee's body is cultivated land that never disappears in the dominant cultural frame

(see Table 1). The body is used as a play tool to be stared at so that it strengthens the predicate attached to the status of a divorcee, namely: sexy, seductive, always needs men to channel sexual desire, and great on the bed (Nurlian, Yana, Juraida & Triyanto 2019; Suhan, Sakira, Genda, Haris & Amin, 2020). Through Barthes' semiotic reading stage, the following can be found.

1. The imitation effect stage: the image displayed is an engineering of the female body without being straightforwardly depicted openly, without the barrier of the norm of decency, which is strengthened by words that represent what is written in the image.

2. Pose the subject in pictures as a subject that is challenging, seductive, provokes sexual desire (through thighs, breasts, eye gaze)

3. The object displayed in the divorcee's meme's picture implies the idea that the gaze about her will be appropriate when seen from her body, which is supported by symbols of beauty through her eyes, hair, thighs, waist and breasts.

4. The image displayed in the divorcee's meme is displayed in bright colours with clear lighting so that women's bodies appear transparent.

5. The aesthetics shown in memes through the emphasised breasts, seductive smile, thighs, and body curves can be seen clearly so that the effect of ecstasy appears.

6. The syntax that emerges is a unity about the divorcee as a creature who plays with the body's capital to strengthen the sexual image.

The connotation that emerges from the divorcee's meme images on the three blogs tries to contrast the divorcee's body with a virgin, which is seen as a body

without power, without expertise/experience in the context of sexual intercourse. This depiction builds the myth that all such divorcees conform to the meme's implied and implied message. Referring to Derrida's theory of deconstruction (Derrida, 1972), this myth needs to be dismantled through a new meaning that divorcee's status does not always have to be associated with sexual desire that presents men as a measure of happiness, peace and tranquillity.

However, that negative stigma, sexually available, has been attached to divorcee status based on the Indonesian cultural logic (Parker, 2016). In fact, in social reality, this is not the case. Some divorcees pursue peace through devotion to children, to God, to professions (Yun, Kim, & Chung, 2014). Many divorcees live in poverty because they have lost their husbands to support the family (Macias, 2013; Sossou, 2002). Thus, most divorcees have to fight hard for their lives and their children (Singh, 2019). Thus, it is difficult for a divorcee who already has children to look beautiful and dress up like a girl in reality.

#### *Readings on the Discourse of the Body in Divorcee Memes*

Women are commonly seen as objects and commodities (Sajed, 2018). Men are the market and demand, while women are the supply. Therefore, women become a fabricated product, namely being disinvested from the body and wearing clothes again in a form that makes them suitable for exchange among men through the media used. That is why sexuality is so attractive in the media. Because the sexuality displayed is what makes the media popular because the male audience finds "entertainment" from the media, male

**Table 1** Classification of divorcee meme signs that strengthen the sexual image of divorcee

Denotation	Connotation
Describing a young woman, smiling cheerfully, dressed openly added challenging words	Indicates the profile of the divorcee with a plump, sexy, fashionable body with a seductive gaze
The depiction of an Utzad commenting on the divorcee's strong body	The biological expression of admiration for the divorcee's body
Portraits of faces staring with a sense of admiration	Expressions that hold desires that are relevant to the accompanying discourse on recognition of the ability of divorcees to be biologically superior to girls
A dreamy but seductive smile, supported by portrait words that represent the status of a divorcee with a seductive title	Facial expressions are used as capital for flirting
Describes a young woman, smiling cheerfully, dressed openly	Indicates the profile of the divorcee with a plump, sexy, fashionable body with a seductive gaze
Describes two women in open clothes with the words virgin and divorcee written	The hint that a seductive body is worth more than the word charming
A woman carries an umbrella with striking words about the need for a divorcee's body as a reserve during the rainy season.	A sign that the divorcee's body is a channel for male sexual desires
Describes a young woman, smiling cheerfully, dressed openly with self-offering words	Suggests divorcees as figures peddling their bodies to seduce men
Written sentence, "Looking for a divorcee who tastes like a girl, there are many girls who taste like a divorcee."	A sign that the search for a divorcee's body is only for male sexual satisfaction
The picture of a woman holding corn as a visualisation of male genitalia is complemented by the words of the divorcee winning experience.	A sign that the divorcee's experience of her body play is male sexual satisfaction

Source: Data Analysis Result

audiences will give their visual attention more to the face, the breasts, and the midriff of the female body (Garza, Heredia & Cieslicka, 2016). In this connection, divorceehood is used as entertainment or material for ridicule, which is viewed from the perspective of patriarchal culture.

The power seen in the divorcee's meme can be attributed to Bourdieu's thinking about power in the cultural sphere. The power displayed in the divorcee's meme appears in the form of discourse. Ricouer (1981) emphasised the locus of discourse on two aspects, namely, events and meaning. According to Ricouer (1981), discourse is an event with four accompanying characteristics. The four characteristics include: (1) related to place and time; (2) has a subject in the sense of "who is speaking"; (3) refers to something that is being discussed / the world that he is describing; and (4) the locus for the exchange of messages and events.

Based on Ricouer's thoughts on discourse a field of discourse on the aspects used as a discourse in divorcee memes from the three blogs is used as the writing object, such as the following (Ricoeur, 1974)

1. A divorcee is like a young woman: beautiful, white, sexy with a middle to upper social background who appears with the gesture of a body vendor.
2. Divorcees are like male provocateurs by showing off their bodies openly.
3. The body of the divorcee becomes a ringing site for building male voyeuristic fantasies.
4. A divorcee's image through memes is an object of spectacle for channelling sexual desire, and a divorcee is a creature without desire.

The discourse on women's bodies is positioned in the divorcee's meme from the three blogs to become a kind of mass theatre and mass spectacle shown on the commodity stage so that commodity as spectacle can be a spectacle as a commodity. This confirms the views of Baudrillard

(1998), who expressed his thoughts on the image of women in the media. He called the media a simulacrum medium, which is a substitute term for "reality screen" or "spectacle", which is a modern culture as a result of image technology in which the human body is made into a kind of prosthetic screen that floats humans in the hyperreality space of the simulacrum that contains images and obscenity. The position of the divorcee's body that is highlighted can build a stigma about wildness, which according to Parker (2016), the stigma attached to divorcees is related to gender and morals in which the divorcee's identity as a good woman is threatened.

#### *Emancipatory Readers of the Divorcee Meme*

Readers who participated expressed their views on the divorcee meme from various groups consisting of students, academics, students and the general public, totalling 45 people. There were two views, namely, (1) a view that supports patriarchal culture; and (2) an emancipatory view. The views of divorcee meme readers can be seen in Table 2

Based on the reader's viewpoint, the categories of readers' expressions under the umbrella of patriarchal culture focus on the divorcee's body as a sex object (24%). It is inversely proportional to the emancipatory view (76%), which positions divorcees from a humanist perspective. This means that the position of divorcees in the virtual media is only a cultural construction that can be shaken, not established. A three-year investigation (2018, 2019, 2020) of the presence of divorcee memes in virtual media represents a consistent affirmation of divorcees' positions as sex objects.

Analysis of the reader's responses obtained a more detailed understanding that the virtual media's divorcees are positioned as dependent beings, immoral because

**Table 2** Views of Divorcee Meme Readers

Category	Statement	Occurrence
Support Patriarchy	Divorcees are more experienced in sex matters	3
	Divorcees are very good in bed, and there is no equal	4
	Divorcees can satisfy male lust	2
	Millennial era is hard to find seductive virgin women	1
	Divorcees are more challenging and courageous	1
Emancipatory	Not educating	10
	Divorcees do not deserve to be sexual objects	6
	Divorcees are only male imaginative objects	4
	The divorcee is a fighter in making a living and taking care of children	3
	It is unethical for divorcees to be made fun of	2
	This is a form of women's exploitation	2
	It's just looking for attention	1
	The meme of the divorcee's far-fetched joke	5
	Harassment	1
	Total	45

Source: Results of data processing

they seduce men. They were slandered as predatory, greedy and evil. The body on display is a form of fetishism, which uses the female body as a stimulus to increase libido. In this context, the appearance of a divorcee's body as a male sex object is an act of fetishism in building sexual fantasies. The positioning of the divorcee in the form of memes implies ambiguity. On the one hand, it is implied that women depend on men's presence, but on the other hand, it is implied that the divorcee's body determines the male libido desire.

Also, the position of divorcees in the virtual field reflects the affirmation of a patriarchal ideology as an established ideology which is actually built on fragile foundations. It can be rocked because it is just a cultural construction. Stigma, stereotypes, marginalisation of divorcees in the virtual field are only man-made as part of political action.

The dominance of patriarchal culture in the divorcee case is suitable when viewed from the theory of nature and structure. MacCormack and Strathern (1980) explained that the formation of male domination over women can be viewed from the theory of nature and culture. According to this theory, the dichotomy of nature and culture leads to a change in nature towards culture. In the process of transformation from nature to culture, conquest often occurs. Men who are described as a culture have the authority to conquer and impose their will on women (nature). This assumption shows that culturally men are indeed placed in a higher position than women. So, directly or indirectly, this affects the perspective, assessment or behaviour of society in family life and socio-cultural life. This theory illustrates that the socio-cultural aspect has formed a social structure and social perception that is conducive to the domination of societal stereotypes on the existence of women, especially those predicated as divorcees (due to divorce) (Margi & Atmadja, 2007).

The position of divorcees in memes is full of stereotypes that only focus on matters of the body that are connected to matters of the bed. It is clear that divorcees in memes are only seen as objects of sexuality. The continuous production of memes will be able to perpetuate a negative image and never change. Moreover, it is related to the mass media industry as a discourse creator with certain ideological content, so that text makers in the media as the owner of power will freely build their vision. Memes in the virtual field are very much at odds with divorcees in social reality. The divorcee meme that was raised adopted a divorcee in the upper-middle class. And, this cannot represent the divorcees whose number is actually much larger, namely the lower class.

The portrait of a divorcee in a virtual field is a production of discourse that actually perpetuates the existing stigma. As long as the media produces discourse on the divorcee

as depicted in the divorcee's meme, during that time, the stigma about divorcees will never change because the position of divorcees is often linked to society's ideal norms about them (Parker, Riyani & Nolan, 2016).

## Conclusion

The portrait of a divorcee featured in the divorcee's meme for three years (2018, 2019, 2020) has not changed through the depiction of the body as a sex object and satisfying male desires. This contrasts with the portrait of a divorcee in a social reality, where the divorcee's problem is often not related to sexual matters but with the ways of surviving with her divorcehood status. Denotatively, divorcees in memes are depicted through the protrusion of body parts that invite sensuality accompanied by seductive sentences. The connotation that appears in the divorcee's meme is ambiguity between someone that is powerless, without expertise/experience in a sexual context, with someone that is strong for the satisfaction of male sexual desires. The readers' view of the divorcee meme is more inclined to oppose the positioning of the divorcee as a sex object. In addition, it shows that the sexual objectification of women through meme, in Indonesia context, constitutes humor and patriarchal culture at the same time.

This study was limited to the image of the divorcee from the divorcee memes point of view. Thus, to confirm the view of Indonesian people about divorcees, a further study in the form of a survey study is needed. The survey needs to be conducted by differentiating the respondents by age and gender in order to see the Indonesian people's perspective in a more comprehensive way.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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