

## The Public Perceptions of Transgender Identity as 'the Other' in Social Media

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### Abstrak

Waria atau yang juga dikenal sebagai transgender perempuan, meskipun seringkali dikucilkan dari masyarakat, kini kehadiran mereka menjadi lebih eksis di Indonesia pada era globalisasi. Dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, mereka berhasil mendapatkan popularitas melalui pemanfaatan perkembangan sosial media yang sangat pesat. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara kritis persepsi publik terhadap transgender perempuan, menggunakan kasus salah satu tokoh transgender selebriti di Indonesia, yakni Lucinta Luna. Peneliti menganalisis komentar pengguna Instagram pada akun Lucinta Luna, sebagai bentuk representasi bagaimana publik merespons identitas Luna sebagai seorang transgender. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis tematik sebagai metode analisis. Peneliti menggunakan Computer-Aided Qualitative Analysis Software (CAQDAS) NVivo 12 untuk menganalisis data. Selain itu, studi ini mengadopsi teori 'the other' dari Hall untuk mengkaji secara kritis bagaimana masyarakat Indonesia merespons transgender perempuan. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa dua tema utama muncul dari komentar keseluruhan pengguna Instagram terhadap identitas Luna, yakni respons negatif dan positif. Pada kedua tema tersebut, masing-masing memunculkan tiga sub-tema, yakni sindiran, kritik agama, dan pelecehan seksual dalam tema negatif, serta kekaguman, komedi, dan sikap dukungan pada tema positif.

**Kata Kunci:** Transgender, Media Sosial, Persepsi Publik, The Other

### Abstract

Waria also known as transgender women, despite consistent exclusion from society, are becoming increasingly visible in Indonesia during the era of globalization. In recent years, they have gained more popularity by leveraging the rapid development of social media. This study aims to critically examine public perceptions of transgender, using the case of one of Indonesia's most famous transgender figures, Lucinta Luna. The researcher analyses Instagram users' comments on her account, as a representation of how the public responds to Luna's identity as a transgender. This study utilizes a qualitative approach and thematic analysis as the analytical method. To analyze the data, this research uses Computer-Aided Qualitative Analysis Software (CAQDAS) NVivo 12. Furthermore, this study adopts Hall's theory of 'the other' to critically examine how Indonesians respond to transgenders. This research found that two significant themes emerged from overall Instagram users' comments on Luna's identity, which are negative and positive public perceptions. In both themes, three sub-themes emerged: sarcasm, religious criticism, and sexual harassment in the negative theme, and admiration, comedy, and a supportive attitude in the positive theme.

**Keywords:** Transgender, Social Media, Public Perceptions, The Other

## INTRODUCTION

The existence of *waria* in Indonesia is a dilemmatic phenomenon and continues to be debated in society. The term *waria*, which was coined in 1978 by the DKI Jakarta government, is an amalgam of the words *wanita* (woman) and *pria* (man) (Boellstorff, 2004). This term

refers to anatomically male individuals who express their gender identity as female (Toomitsu, 2019). Even though they are born male, *waria* think they have had *jiwa perempuan* (woman's soul) since childhood (Hegarty, 2018; Sunardi, 2009; Toomitsu, 2019). For example, *waria* have shown signs of femininity since childhood, such as spending more time playing with dolls with other girls (Toomitsu, 2019).

Some scholars argue that *waria* is different from the generally understood concept of transgender. According to Boellstorff (2007), using a term such as transgender will bring the connotation of "moving beyond gender", which refers to the connotation that someone has transitioned from one gender to another, for instance, by undergoing genital reassignment surgery (p. 82). However, based on the research conducted by Boellstorff (2007), not all male transvestites undergo or desire the surgery. He also emphasizes that only a few *waria* manage to undergo sex reassignment surgery due to financial problems and psychological factors. Additionally, in a book written by Wijaya (2020b), there has been a shift regarding *waria* terminology. Since 2016, the term *waria* has slowly changed to become transgender women (*transpuan*) in society. This change is because some people argue that the term *waria* is no longer relevant and is considered rude, as argued by Dinda Syarief, one of Indonesia's transgender figures, in an interview (Corbuzier, 2022, 3:14-3.25).

Apart from the debate over terminology, one crucial aspect that determines whether a person can be categorized as a *waria* (transgender) or not is *dendong*. Hegarty (2018) defines *dendong* as "the laborious effort that one makes to alter one's outer appearance to achieve a feminine gender presentation" (p. 356). *Dendong* is a process of projecting the woman's soul inside a *waria* on her physical appearance (Boellstorff, 2007, p. 90). By engaging in *dendong*, *waria* change their physical appearance to be more feminine like women, such as wearing wigs and women's clothes ranging from high heels to various accessories. In research conducted by Hegarty (2018), it was found that *waria* also take contraceptive drugs to increase breast size. Therefore, she argues that *dendong* is the culmination of an individual's transformation to become a *waria* (Hegarty, 2018, p. 357). Thus, a person cannot be categorized as a *waria* if she has not done *dendong*.

Once *dendong* is done, *waria* are seen as taboo individuals because their behavior and visual appearance are different from society (Wijaya, 2020b). It makes them vulnerable to violence and assault (Boellstorff, 2020). Often, *waria* are also considered a threat to the stability of social norms (Wijaya, 2020b). Since the way they express their gender does not follow what is deemed normal, their action is categorized as a social deviation (Susanki & Oktavia, 2013). One example can be seen in a statement of a transgender respondent in Sunardi's (2009) research, stating that closed-minded people, especially those in rural areas, would "force the men with female hearts' to live as men and marry a woman, sometimes with tragic consequences." (p. 7)

By doing *dendong*, *waria* are considered a vulnerable group to discrimination and exclusion from society. According to Toomistu (2022), most *waria* run away from home at a teenage age to seek a new life in big cities such as Jakarta. They do this because of the rejection from their family and the community where they live. Consequently, they must lose their citizenship card (KTP), birth certificate, and school certificate (Wijaya, 2020b). Such situations make it difficult for them to get jobs, education, and health access from the

government. Based on collaborative research between Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia and UNDP in 2015, a survey of 100 *waria* in the capital city of Jakarta showed that they were considered disadvantaged groups. First, most of the *waria* in Jakarta have low educational attainment. Many of them had to run away from home before graduating from school. Secondly, they have difficulty accessing health facilities from the government because they do not have identity cards (Wijaya, 2020b). Thirdly, most respondents' monthly income is far below the capital city minimum wage. Due to the limited living conditions, Toomistu (2022) wrote that many *waria* are trapped in the prostitution business to survive.

Although most people still do not accept *waria*, their existence has long roots in Indonesian culture. For example, it can be seen through traditional *Ludruk* theatre and *Lengger Lanang* dance performances. The existence of *waria*, which a few decades ago could only be expressed through the media of art, such as *Ludruk* and *Lengger Lanang*, is now slowly being revitalized through globalization. With the development of technology and information, *waria* in Indonesia define their identity. Based on Hegarty's (2008) research on elderly *waria* women who had experienced life in Indonesia's new order era (1968-1998), they stated that their identity as *waria* in Indonesia was not influenced or derived from western media. As previously mentioned, this is because *waria* see themselves as a woman since childhood. In this context, Hegarty (2008) wrote that *waria* in Indonesia made sense of their identity through the pedagogical role of the media, especially since the New Order era. "*Waria drew on technologies of film, television, and magazines to fashion a sense of self that was shaped by national belonging and transnational images in tacit ways*", wrote Hegarty (2008, p. 265).

Furthermore, Boellstorff (2004) stated that *waria* in Indonesia experienced a new order era as a significant period because the feeling of national belonging arose in. This feeling, argues Boellstorff, is shown by the community's increased visibility of transgender women. Therefore, *waria* begin to believe that they are "*very much part of the national culture*" (Sunardi, 2009, p. 477). In other words, through the development of technology and information, globalization acts as a medium for *waria* to define their identity. As such, a crucial turning point in the revitalization of the meaning of *waria* occurred through the change of terminology from *waria* to *transpuan* since 2016. Through the use of the word transgender (*transpuan*), it is considered that now *waria* is part of a global movement (Boellstorff, 2022).

As a part of a global community, nowadays, transgender individuals massively use social media to stay connected with others and to gather essential information for their lives (Cannon et al., 2017). Moreover, Buss et al. (2022) argue that this social network system also contributes as a critical space for trans people to express their stories and identities. However, he contends that transgender individuals unfortunately are always at risk of facing discrimination due to their status as marginalized communities. Therefore, understanding the experiences of transgender individuals, especially in social media platforms where there are no boundaries between people, is crucial because they constantly face the potential of receiving threats.

This study uses the online experience of one of the prominent transgender figures in Indonesia, Lucinta Luna. With the increase in the use of social media, Luna changed her profession from a dangdut singer to become a celebrity and influencer on social media, namely YouTube and Instagram. Luna's plastic surgeries and the use of feminine clothes, as part of

her *dendong* activities, make her even more visually sensational in Indonesian society. Even though she was born male, Luna believes that she has a female soul. This was revealed in one of Luna's interviews with the top YouTuber in Indonesia, Boy William. During the interview, Luna said that she had had a female soul since childhood. Moreover, since childhood, her sister has always dressed her like a woman. For instance, he is dressed in women's clothes and given makeup like a woman. Her childhood experience further strengthens Luna's feminine character and makes her even more fond of playing with other girls. Consequently, since childhood, Luna became the object of bullying, both from her friends and relatives.

Lucinta Luna and the other transgender in Indonesia, in general, are a form of representation of 'the other'. Most Indonesians think that being a *waria* is a deviant social behavior (Susanki & Oktavia, 2013). One of the reasons is that being a *waria* is against the religious, cultural, and social norms that exist in society (Fajarini, 2021; Toomistu, 2022). In the case of Luna, for example, in 2018, the issue of Luna's gender identity became a public debate, leading to public demands for Luna to admit that she was a transgender person (BBC, 2018). However, after the announcement, Luna became more famous and received more entertainment job offers, particularly as a guest star on entertainment shows on television and talk shows on YouTube. Finally, Luna created her own YouTube channel, entitled Lucinta Luna TV, in 2021. Then in early 2022, she was chosen as the star of Woods' Lozenges advertisement in Indonesia. Within a year after the ad was uploaded to Youtube, the number of views of the Woods' Lozenges ad video has crossed the 4 million mark (WOODS', 2023).

As a transgender, Luna, who cannot be identified into the two categories of sex spectrum in Indonesia, is considered a strange thing. For some people, transgender like Luna should not exist in the community because she can threaten the stability of social norms (Fajarini, 2021; Susanki & Oktavia, 2013; Wijaya, 2020b). First, the Muslim group's view rejects the existence of Luna and the LGBTQ+ group in general because it is considered sinful behavior. Most Indonesian Muslim people believe that the life choice to become a transgender is sinful behavior because it is out of their nature as a man (Mulyana et al., 2019; Toomistu, 2022). Secondly, there is a belief from the public that Luna and transgender groups are generally affiliated with free sex as well as sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS (Arfanda and Sakaria, 2015). Consequently, *waria* are considered a dangerous group that has the potential to transmit sexually transmitted diseases.

As a representation of 'the other,' Luna can be understood using Hall's (1997) four theoretical frameworks, which include linguistic, language theories, anthropological perspectives, and psychoanalytic (p. 234-239). From a linguistic viewpoint, it's suggested that 'difference' matters because it's crucial for creating meaning. Looking at language frameworks, Hall brings in the idea from Bakhtin (1981(1935)) that dialogue is dynamic and affects how meaning is formed based on the people involved. Then, anthropologically, Hall says that culture, seen as a 'symbolic order,' shapes what we consider different (p. 236). Drawing on Douglas's work (1966), Hall argues that people make sense of things by organizing information in a classification system. In the psychoanalytic aspect, Hall highlights 'the other' as essential for shaping who we are, our identity, and our understanding of sexuality (p. 237). Referring to Lacan's insights (1977), Hall explains how 'the other' plays a big role in creating meaning.

Based on the above research background, the research objective of this study is to investigate how the public responds to Luna's identity on social media, specifically Instagram. This study aims to contribute to critically examining the public perceptions of Lucinta Luna (a transgender individual) as 'the other' in Indonesian society. Not only will this study provide critical insights for scholars and academia in understanding the recent phenomenon of transgender individuals in society, but it will also contribute to understanding the long history of male-to-female transgender development in Indonesia.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach to understand the existence of transgender individuals in Indonesia on social media. Essentially, the qualitative approach focuses on word analysis rather than quantifying data (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, Bryman also argued that the substance of the qualitative approach in this study is to achieve an understanding of specific phenomena occurring in society, as these phenomena will always change and be influenced by human interactions. Based on the nature of qualitative research, this approach is highly suitable for understanding and exploring the complex phenomenon of transgender individuals in Indonesia. Therefore, this type of research is advantageous for exploring and understanding societal problems (Moser & Korstjens, 2017).

The analytical method used in this study is thematic analysis. In 1999, Pawson stated that this type of analysis focuses solely on identifying themes throughout the data. "Themes" in this type of analysis were defined by Hawkins (2017) as a "common line of understanding occurring within the data" (p. 1757). By using this analytical method, researchers hope to understand and interpret a wide range of datasets (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

The study focuses on user comments posted on Lucinta Luna's Instagram account (@lucintaluna\_manjalita). These comments were collected from her monthly posts starting from her first Instagram post until the time of the research, totalling around 29 posts from June 2021 to October 2023. Each post includes both photos and videos. The research analyses user-generated content, specifically Instagram comments, following the method used by Majid and Pal (2020). A total of 725 comments, with approximately the top 25 comments per post, were thematically analyzed. To facilitate data analysis, the researcher uses Computer-Aided Qualitative Analysis Software (CAQDAS), namely NVivo 12, to analyze thematically the datasets. Thematic coding is conducted using an inductive approach, allowing the codebook created from the datasets to emerge naturally through the coding process performed by the researcher. The final codebook consists of six coding categories.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified two main comment types that reflect how the public perceives and responds to Lucinta Luna's transgender identity. These types cover both positive and negative perceptions. The latter responses include themes such as sarcasm, religious criticism, and sexual harassment. Meanwhile, the former involves themes like admiration, comedy, and a supportive attitude. Table 1 below presents the comprehensive data analysis of public comments on Lucinta Luna's Instagram posts. According to the analysis, most Instagram users responded positively to Luna's identity as a transgender celebrity in Indonesia, with a total

positive response rate of 61.58%. Conversely, negative responses to Luna's appearance were notably lower but still significant, accounting for 33.18% of the total responses.

Table 1. Summary of the Comment Types on Lucinta Luna's Instagram

Comment Types		Examples	Comments (%)	Total
Negative Responses	Sarcasm	"Male mermaid", "The beauty of a doctor's creation", "How pretty you are, Mas Fatah"	180 (24.68%)	242 (33.18%)
	Religious Criticism	"Disgusting queen, actually I have no problem with whatever you want to do as you wish, only what I regret is that you choose to change your nature that has been determined by Allah..."	49 (6.72%)	
	Sexual Harassment	"To be honest, not being hypocritical, I feel aroused"	13 (1.78%)	
	Admiration	"Stunning", "Like a Barbie", "Whether a male or female, Luna is incredibly beautiful", "Heavenly angel!"	175 (23.99%)	
Positive Responses	Comedy	"Must-watch, it's really funny and hilarious!", "Luna, you are so funny!", "May you receive rewards from God for making us laugh, dear Queen of eternity"	145 (19.89%)	449 (61.58%)
	Support	"Those who comment harshly, even though Sister Queen has never bothered anyone. Whatever she wants to do, it's her choice"	129 (17.70%)	
	Unrelated	Off-topic, like someone sending an advertisement comment or giving a comment unrelated to Lucinta Luna (i.e., "Still unsure about playing online games? Come join our website!")	34 (5.24%)	
All Responses				725 (100%)

Furthermore, in Figure 1 below, the top 25 most frequent keywords in the comments section of Luna's posts are displayed by using NVivo 12. Some of the keywords are "cantik" (beautiful) and "banget" (very), where the latter is often used alongside "beautiful", to convey a sense of gorgeousness. Following these, other keywords like "perempuan" or "wanita" (woman), and "bidadari" (angel) appear. These words carry positive connotations, with people perceiving Luna as a pretty woman even though they are aware that she was once identified as a man. On the contrary, terms like "berubah" or "merubah" (change) and "ciptaan" (creature) imply how some perceive Luna as someone who underwent genital replacement surgery to transition from being a man to a woman. Based on the overall keywords shown below, it is evident that most comments on Luna's Instagram posts are positive in terms of keyword frequency.

Figure 1. Top 25 most frequent words on Lucinta Luna's Instagram comment



By being a transgender woman in Indonesia, Lucinta Luna inevitably faces negative reactions from the public. According to the analysis of Instagram comments, approximately 24.68% of the responses from Instagram users to Luna's posts consist of sarcasm regarding her transgender identity. People make sarcastic remarks about Luna's masculinity, calling her a "male mermaid" (*duyung jantan*), commenting about "the beauty of a doctor's creation" (*indahny ciptaan dokter*), labelling her as a "fake woman" (*wanita jadi-jadian*), or even using Luna's original name to mock her, "how pretty you are, *Mas Fatah*" (*Cantiknya, Mas Fatah*). This study corroborates a previous study that argued transgender individuals who undergo *dendong* (in this case it relates to plastic surgery activities, using feminine clothes, and wearing makeup) are considered taboo (Wijaya, 2020b). This is because they differ from the general societal norms and cannot be easily categorized as either male or female in Indonesia.

This study also confirms what previous research has found, that transgender is considered a form of social deviation from religious values in Indonesia (Fajarini, 2021; Mulyana et al., 2019; Toomistu, 2022). About 6.72% of Instagram comments about Luna express disapproval of her identity as a behavior deviating from religious values. Most of the criticism on Instagram against Luna is closely tied to Islamic values. This is because Luna used to be a Muslim man named Muhammad Fatah. Therefore, public criticism sees Luna's behavior as 'the other' and a sinner. That is because criticism from netizens based on religious issues revolves around the belief that Luna's behavior is sinful and deserves punishment from God for altering the nature/creation that God initially made as a man into a woman. An example of criticism from one Instagram user towards Luna is as follows. "*Disgusting queen, actually I have no problem with whatever you want to do as you wish, only what I regret is that you choose to change your nature that has been determined by Allah...*".

Figure 2. Lucinta Luna received religious criticism from her followers



Source: Instagram/@lucintaluna\_manjalita

Moreover, as a transgender, Lucinta Luna is no exception to sexual harassment on social media. Comments often mention how users feel sexually tempted by Luna's visual appearance. One example includes comments about Luna's genitalia, which has undergone gender reassignment surgery, making some Instagram users feel aroused. Although the number of comments in the sub-theme of sexual harassment is not significant, accounting for only about 1.78% of the overall datasets, it's crucial to highlight the vulnerability of



transgender individuals to discrimination and sexual harassment. As Hall (1997) points out, those classified as 'the other' are not seen as 'human', and their self-value is diminished, making any form of discrimination or mistreatment towards them seem acceptable and normalized. Therefore, discrimination and harassment against transgender individuals as the other are consequently considered normal. This is aligned with Buss et.al (2022) argument that transgender individuals are always at risk of being discriminated by other people.

On the other side, however, despite being transgender, Lucinta Luna's visual appeal has garnered widespread admiration from her followers. Her appearance positions Luna within the female gender spectrum, as she visually closely resembles an average woman. Achieving this look involved various plastic surgery procedures, a topic Luna openly discusses on social media without considering it taboo. Luna frequently shares her surgery journey on her social media platforms, showcasing the procedures she undergoes. This is one of Luna's ways of sharing her identity and some of her experiences as a transgender individual with the public (Buss et al., 2022).

Positive public perceptions of Luna's identity as a transgender are evident in the responses from the Instagram community, primarily characterized by expressions of admiration. This theme in this study is significant, constituting approximately 23.99% of all comments on Luna's posts. Netizens generally praise Luna for her beauty and view her as a distinctive celebrity. Some examples of their comments include: "*Stunning, like a Barbie*", "*Whether a male or female, Luna is incredibly beautiful!*", and some even resemble Luna's beauty to that of a "heavenly angel".

Figure 3. Lucinta Luna received admiration from her followers



Source: Instagram/@lucintaluna\_manjalita

In addition to the Instagram comments filled with admiration, another significant pattern in the public's perceptions of Luna revolves around the comedic aspect. This is closely linked to the consistent persona Luna presents in public—a charming and humorous transgender individual unafraid to engage in humor. For instance, there's a post from Luna in October 2022 where she wore a blue bodycon costume to portray the Avatar character. The response from Instagram users was overwhelmingly positive, with most expressing their appreciation for Luna's effort to be a funny and entertaining figure. One comment from the Instagram users went like this. "*Luna, consider trying this for your content: Pulling off a prank*



*in the middle of the night at a red traffic light. Step out with an Avatar-inspired style and pretend to aim at someone in a car or walking by, all captured on a hidden camera. Can you imagine the reactions of those pranked? It's sure to be a thrilling experience!"* The theme of comedy that emerges from the datasets holds significant value, constituting 19.89% of the overall data. Hence, it can be asserted that a majority of Instagram users respond positively to Luna's transgender identity due to the comedic values she portrays on social media. This suggests that people find Luna entertaining and view her as a comedian. As a result, this situation has made Luna less perceived as the other.

Furthermore, a significant theme that emerged from the comments on Luna's Instagram post was the supportive attitude of netizens. As much as 17.70% of the entire dataset contains support given by Instagram users to Luna's efforts to express her identity as a transgender individual and consistently entertain the public. One example is the netizens' support for Luna after she uploaded a video clip of a song she sang in November 2022. Some examples of this support are as follows, *"I swear, the video clip is really good"*, and *"Our queen is great, keep up your spirit!"*.

Another form of support for Luna comes from comments by Instagram users encouraging her to maintain enthusiasm for living life as a transgender individual. First, by commenting that Luna doesn't need to dwell on other people's hurtful comments. Furthermore, some stated that Luna should stay strong and not be weakened, even in the face of numerous insults. Some even argued that Luna's aura is becoming more positive, bringing happiness to her fans every day. Additionally, some consider Luna an inspirational figure in terms of resilience. Finally, other Instagram users openly supported and defended Luna's identity as a transgender woman by saying, *"You haters have to understand that she (Luna) is a woman trapped in a man's body, and she is trying to express her identity as a woman with a man's body. What's wrong with feeling like a woman but inhabiting a man's body?"*

Figure 4. Lucinta Luna received supportive comments from her followers



Source: Instagram/@lucintaluna\_manjalita

As a manifestation of the other, Luna can be comprehended through Hall's (1997) four theoretical frameworks of the other. The frameworks encompass perspectives from linguistics, language theories, anthropology, and psychoanalysis. From a linguistic approach of 'the other', it is argued that 'difference' matters because it is essential to meaning; without it, meaning

could not exist'. In this context, Luna is categorized as transgender, representing 'the other,' as a means to contrast transgender individuals with those considered normal. For instance, in Indonesian society, only two genders, male and female, are legally accepted (Oetomo & Suvianita, 2013). These distinctions enable the creation of meaning. In this study, numerous comments from netizens explicitly label Luna as a fake female. According to them, there are only two gender spectrums in Indonesia: male and female. Consequently, anyone not falling within these categories is perceived as engaging in deviant behavior and considered fake. This situation, from the perspective of Hall (1997), on the other hand, contributes to creating the meaning of what transgender is.

Moreover, from the perspective of language, Hall (1997) introduces Mikhail Bakhtin's thoughts. According to Bakhtin (1935), dialogue is 'dialogic' because it plays an essential role in forming meaning. Therefore, the construction of meaning may change depending on the participants in the dialogue. For instance, Luna can be perceived as 'abnormal' when she is in a society that considers transgender as a social deviation (Jones, 2020). On the other hand, Luna may be assigned 'meaning' as 'normal' only when she is with people who agree to challenge the definition of normal that is already standardized in society. This can be observed in the result analysis of this study, where a significant number of comments from Instagram users show empathy, admiration, support, and even defense for Luna's choice as a transgender individual. For these individuals, Luna is 'normal,' and she has the right to choose her life. Conversely, another significant group of netizens defines Luna as a sinner, abnormal, and fake female. These differences represent Hall's (1997) argument of 'the other' in the perspective of language, where those labeled as the other could form various meanings depending on who sees them.

Furthermore, through an anthropological approach, Hall (1997) argues that culture, which refers to 'symbolic order', defines what difference is. People create meaning by making a classification system by ordering and organizing information (Douglas, 1966). In this context, the meaning of Luna as the other arises from the constructed classification system of gender in Indonesia. In this country, only two types of gender are recognized by the law (Oetomo & Suvianita, 2013). Thus, Luna cannot fit into the existing categories. In that regard, then, she is not in the man or woman category. Hence, making her 'the other', as the opposite of the pre-existed category. On the other side, by being 'the other', Luna can be understood as what Babcock (1978) said is 'socially peripheral' and 'symbolically centered' (p. 32). This can be seen from how Luna has always been a hot topic of gossip. So, indirectly, this has contributed to the increase in Luna's fame to this day.

Lastly, we can understand Luna as 'the other' through a psychoanalytic account. In this approach, Hall (1997) argues that "the other is fundamental to the constitution of the self, to us as subjects, and to sexual identity" (p. 237). Here, Hall mentioned the work of Jacques Lacan (1977) regarding how 'the other' contributes to constructing meaning. According to Lacan, during the mirror stage, when an individual is still in childhood, he has the opportunity to see the world (as the other, outside of himself) for the first time). Through this stage, an individual constructs his identity, defining who he truly is. In Luna's case, it can be seen from how Luna sees herself as a woman. She projects that belief into her identity by engaging in

*dendong*, exemplified by feminine gestures, adopting women's clothing styles, applying makeup, and even undergoing numerous plastic surgeries.

Furthermore, Hall (1997) also argued that those who are identified as 'the other' will be "reduced to a few essentials, fixed in nature by a few, simplified characteristics" (p. 249), because of stereotypes. As an illustration, in the case of Luna, based on Hall's theory, people could see her as a man who wears women's clothes; she has deviant behavior, and her body does not seem to fit into the two existing gender categories (Susanki & Oktavia, 2013; Oetomo & Suvianita, 2013). Therefore, her existence is a threat to the status quo in society (Wijaya, 2020b). She is the representation of 'the other' and this means that she is abnormal and unacceptable (Jones, 2020). For example, the sub-theme of religious criticism and sarcasm that emerged from this study strongly reflects Hall's argument. People view Luna as something other than a human being. To them, Luna embodies deviant behavior within society—she's seen as just a man dressing and grooming like a woman. Consequently, Luna is considered both unacceptable and abnormal (Jones, 2020). However, at the same time, as argued by Hall (1997), Luna is both 'necessary' and 'dangerous' (p. 234). By being necessary, it means that the conversation about Luna becomes an interesting and important thing to discuss because of the differences that she has, giving meaning to what is considered normal in society. Meanwhile, being dangerous means that her differences threaten social equilibrium in society.

The four frameworks used to analyze Luna as 'the other' above can also be interpreted from a more positive perspective. According to Hall (1997), that is because "difference is ambivalent, it can be both positive and negative" (p. 238). Although most people consider Luna as a threat to social equilibrium, on the other side, it is pretty opposing. By being 'the other', Luna has contributed to "the production of meaning, the formation of language and culture, for social identities and a subjective sense of the self as a sexed subject" (Hall, 1997, p. 238). In other words, with Luna's presence as a transgender in society, people can better understand the meaning of transwomen. For instance, by understanding Luna and other transgender women as part of the Indonesian culture (Wijaya, 2020a). Transgender lives in Indonesia, with a different visual appearance from most others (typical plastic surgery faces, masculine voices, and so on). Through Luna's presence, most Indonesians have grown a new culture, namely a culture of tolerance and respect for differences. For example, it can be seen through how people give positive comments and support for Luna's career on her social media account.

Therefore, in Luna's case, we can see how the response from most people changed, from rejecting (especially before she admitted herself as a transgender) to accepting Luna (after admitting to being transgender and undergoing several plastic surgeries). This change is closely related to the concepts of the signifier (the form) and signified (the idea). In his book, Hall (1997) mentions that these two concepts contributed greatly to human efforts to understand the culture, by arguing that "If the relationship between a signifier and its signified is the result of a system of social conventions specific to each society and specific historical moments - then all meanings are produced within history and culture" (p. 32). Suppose the concept of *waria*/transgender still has a negative connotation and received massive rejection from the people in Indonesia before the 20th century, then, particularly since 2017 and above (after the change in the terminology of *waria* changing to transwomen/transgender) this

situation has changed. In this case, the public's response is increasingly changing and open to the existence of transgender. This, once again, can be seen in how Luna's career has become increasingly successful in the Indonesian entertainment world and has received positive support from the community.

However, still, not all transgender are as lucky as Luna, who is increasingly successful through her identity as a transgender. The majority of other *waria* who do not have the financial strength and still have not had plastic surgery are trapped in the form of a feminine man. As previously mentioned, they are still vulnerable to discrimination, violence, and harassment. This is because their physical appearance is trapped between the two existing gender categories; they do not fall into the category of men or women. They are *waria*, the other. Whereas in Luna's case, one of the factors that caused the change in people's response to her was her 'beautiful' physical and visual appearance, which in this context, Luna could have been understood as a woman. However, other *waria* in Indonesia who struggle financially feel excluded and discriminated. They live in a limited way. In a report written by DW News (DW News, 2020), *waria* living in the Kampung Bandan area live with various limitations. Most of them live as buskers. Every day they wear heels and walk for 5 hours to sing. As a body booster, they drink 30 packs of a particular brand of cough medicine. Based on research (Praptoraharjo et al., 2015), their average income is only around one million rupiahs.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows how public perception of transgender women in Indonesia is mostly positive. The term *cantik* (gorgeous) emerges as the most frequently used keyword in the comment sections of Lucinta Luna's Instagram posts. Her successful portrayal as a woman, achieved through genital replacement surgeries and other plastic surgeries, places her beyond the realm of 'the other,' garnering widespread acceptance of her transgender identity. However, a significant number of comments also express rejection of Luna's identity, with some arguing that she represents taboo or deviant behavior capable of destabilizing social norms. Nonetheless, alongside globalization and increased social media usage, perceptions of transgender individuals have evolved. Positive public sentiments towards Luna reflect a belief in her right to choose and admiration for her courage. This suggests an ambivalence in the concept of 'the other,' capable of generating both positive and negative meanings simultaneously. Moreover, through the changes in society's response, we can also understand that 'meaning' is never permanently fixed because it has been continuously produced throughout the history of society

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