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The Impact of Conservative Society to Queer Community in Adelina Ayu's 'Happy Ending Machine'

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ABSTRACT: This research explores the impact of conservative societal norms and the influence of homophobic parents on the homosexual protagonist, Shailendra, as depicted in Adelina Ayu's Happy Ending Machine. Against the background of a society rooted in Indonesia's traditional values, Shailendra's journey unfolds, emphasizing the broader challenges faced by queer individuals navigating the conflict between personal authenticity and societal expectations. Using a qualitative literary analysis, this study explores the emotional and mental impact experienced by Shailendra as he struggles with societal norms, adopts a 'closeted' personality, and develops trust issues. The findings underscore the deep impact of conservative societal norms, depicting Shailendra's struggles as representative of the broader challenges experienced by queer individuals in a society that refuses to accept them. In conclusion, this research advocates for societal empathy and inclusivity, encouraging the creation of an environment where diverse identities can thrive without fear of judgment or discrimination. Shailendra's narrative in Happy Ending Machine serves as a poignant depiction of the complexities inherent in the intersection between personal identity and societal norms, highlighting the need for a more compassionate and understanding society.
Keywords: *queer community discrimination, LGBTQ+ issues, conservative society Indonesia,homophobic culture, closeted persona, trust issues*

In the present day, the queer community struggles with the lasting challenges by conservative society. Despite significant progress in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights, conservative society still persists and shapes the lives of queer individuals. In today's society, where conversations around diversity and acceptance are gaining strength, the discrimination faced by the queer community is still an important concern. The impact of conservative society on queer lives is a vital issue that continues to shape the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals.

The problem arises from prejudices in conservative society, which sustain discrimination and marginalization of queer individuals. These biases come in many forms, from social exclusion to legal restrictions, which create barriers for queer individuals to live openly and fairly. The psychological and emotional impact of such preconceptions is huge, leading to feelings of isolation and a constant struggle for acceptance. Queer individuals often have to face unwelcoming environments, where societal conservatism blocks their ability to express their

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identities freely.

This paper investigates the consequences of conservative society perceptions on the lives of queer individuals through analyzing the characters and their interactions in Adelina Ayu's *Happy Ending Machine*. Through this exploration, this study aims to elaborate the complexity of queer experiences within the context of conservative societal norms.

Adelina Ayu's *Happy Ending Machine* remains an area that has yet to be explored in the realm of scholarly research. The lack of research on this novel arises from its complex portrayal of queer characters in conservative Indonesian society.

To fill this research gap, this study uses the queer approach as a theoretical framework. This theoretical framework, which centers on understanding the subjective experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals within their cultural context, aligns with the recent rise of LGBTQ+ activism in Indonesia despite conservative resistance. The study of queer provides a valuable lens to uncover the characters' internal conflicts, the psychological impact of hiding their true identities, and their journey within the restrictions of a conservative society.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research plan to investigate the deep themes and experiences portrayed in Adelina Ayu's *Happy Ending Machine*. The choice of a descriptive qualitative approach is well suited to this research, as it allows for an in-depth examination of the novel's complex narrative and the lived experiences of queer characters in the context of a conservative society in Indonesia.

The main data source for this research is the novel itself. Extensive reading and textual analysis will be conducted to identify and record key themes, character dynamics, and contextual factors that influence the portrayal of queer experiences. Quotes, fragments and passages relevant to the research questions will be carefully cataloged.

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Shailendra's Conservative Society and Homophobic Parents

Indonesia has a conservative society, which makes individuals consider same-sex relationships as *abnormal*. *Happy Ending Machine* illustrates this through a character named Shailendra. The novel portrays Shailendra's life, where he recognizes that he feels *different*, which is manifested in his lack of attraction to the opposite sex since childhood. As a pampered and highly cared-over only boy, Shailendra bears a particular burden to always make his parents prideful. Living in a conservative society, coupled with his parents' strong belief that any deviation from the heterosexual norm is inherently wrong, Shailendra faces significant challenges in expressing his true identity, as quoted:

> *Semenjijikan apa pun catcalling yang dia terima, wajahnya kelihatan puas, karena itu adalah satu-satunya hal yang bisa waria itu dapat agar dia bisa merasa bahwa dirinya adalah seorang wanita,* even though it was only through fantasy, since the world had been denying her in reality. (P. 133)

Through the quotation describing the concept of queer from Shailendra's perspective, the background of his neighborhood is portrayed, highlighting how society's conservative views affect an individual who identifies as transwoman. In this case, the transwoman comfortably expresses herself, affirming her right to be treated like any other human being. For them, this act is a privilege that they rarely get. Even degrading compliments in the form of catcalling are welcomed, because by doing so, she feels validated in their identity.

A deeper insight into conservative society is revealed in Shailendra's own words expressing a long-buried feeling, *"Lo pikir gue mau dinajis-najisin sama banyak orang sampai dianggap sebagai pembawa bencana alam?"* (P. 171). In reality, it is true that many Indonesians view sexual deviants as carriers of natural disasters. Many even wish for the non-existence of queer individuals, "Hearing people sending death threats to people like us, wanting to beat the shit out of us, and telling us that we deserve to die and burn in hell can really messed up your mind,

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Andra." (P. 105).

This condition made Shailendra feel that he had no choice but to live in fear, "Growed up differently–in this kind of way, in a conservative society, made me feel haunted and trapped." (P. 284) Even finding comfort was a challenge for him, "That's a part of life, Andra. Living in this kind of society. Surviving. You gotta find a way to survive, to be safe." (P. 207)

Even Shailendra's own parents are conservative, which further adds to his anxiety. Throughout the story, it is clear that Shailendra's parents hate gay people.

> *"Zio tuh jeruk makan jeruk, kan? Kalau nanti kalian keluar negeri berdua terus dia godain kamu, gimana? Serem ah, Papa nggak bisa bayanginnya."*
> *"Lah, orang yang suka cowok aku, Pa."*
> *"Sadar kamu kalau ngomong! Nanti beneran!" Bokap mengetuk-ngetuk meja makan dengan sendi-sendi jarinya. "Amit-amit punya anak kayak gitu."*
> *Gue tertawa, tapi hati gue seperti ditikam pisau pelan-pelan. "Zio nggak suka cowok, Pa."*
> *"Siapa yang tahu, Ndra? Hati-hati pokoknya kamu sama dia." Bokap mengangkat bahu dan memilih untuk lanjut makan daripada membahas topik yang paling dia benci.*
> *Nyokap juga sama. Waktu melihat dua orang cowok yang bergandengan tangan, dia langsung mengernyit jijik dan berkomentar kalau dunia sebentar lagi kiamat.* She terribly hated them unless they style her hair prettier, design her dresses, and especially became her personal laughing machine and forget all of her problems. All that yet she still ran them down. *(P. 275-276)*

The clear manifestation of Shailendra's parents' hatred towards the queer community is obvious, and ironically, their only child is part of that community. Phrases such as *"Amit-amit punya anak kayak gitu" "Dunia sebentar lagi kiamat"* are indirectly directed at Shailendra, making it impossible for him to find comfort in his own family. Despite his continuous efforts to live up to his parents' expectations, "I had done so much to meet the social expectation of me. I had done so much to be a perfect son for my parents." (P. 278), the harsh statements from his parents made it difficult for Shailendra to feel the warmth of family. Growing up in such an environment and family made him believe that his difference was a big mistake. "... I just thought I was bad, naturally. Because of what my parents was telling me about people like me, and because of what society I was in." (P. 209)

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3.2. The Impact of Conservative Society and Homophobic Parents on Shailendra

After understanding the conditions around Shailendra, including his own parents, the devastating impact on him can be imagined. The fear of revealing his true identity haunts him at all times, making Shailendra shut himself off from everyone he meets. His closeted persona and trust issues illustrate the impact of being a queer individual living in a conservative society.

3.2.1. Shailendra and His 'Closeted' Persona

Shailendra's closeted personality is one of the significant impacts on him. Living in fear of his true identity being exposed, Shailendra closes off the possibilities by shutting himself away. *"Gue nggak mau kehilangan dan nyakitin orang-orang yang gue sayang. Gue takut mereka lihat gue beda setelah tahu tentang ini. Itu yang sebenarnya paling gue takutin, Ndra."* (P. 207). Lying is not a difficult thing to do to support his consistent and closeted personality. *"Makin sering dan beragam pertanyaan yang mereka lontarkan, makin jago gue berbohong kepada mereka."* (P. 82).

Shailendra's fear continues to eat away at him, affecting him mentally and physically. He often felt the disastrous physical effects when people around him were on the verge of discovering his biggest secret. Once, Zio, Shailendra's close friend of 5 years, accidentally saw a notification on his cell phone showing a message from his male partner. Terrified, Shailendra, who is known for his calm demeanor, explodes.

> *"Gue mencabut handphone, meninggalkan kabel charger-nya masih menempel di stop kontak dan berlari ke toilet, masuk ke dalam salah satu bilik dan memuntahkan isi perut di kloset.*
> *Kepala gue terasa berat dan berputar-putar. Telinga gue berdengung hebat dan tubuh gue gemetaran. Kalau bisa, gue pasti sudah meledakkan diri sendiri supaya nggak perlu merasakan ketakutan yang menyiksa seperti ini lagi. Tapi, naif bila berpikir kalau perasaan kalut ini adalah yang terakhir.*
> *Ketakutan ini akan menghantui gue seumur hidup."* (P. 118)

Despite this, there's always a small desire within him to be more courageous with his

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identity because hiding continuously exhausts him.

> *"Lo pikir gue mau bermain petak umpet setiap hari, menelan semua keinginan untuk curhat dengan siapa pun karena takut rahasia gue terbongkar? Lo pikir gue mau, berbohong kepada semua orang yang gue sayang karena takut mereka nggak bisa menerima gue apa adanya?"* (P. 171)

However, that desire remains tucked away in his heart, unlikely to ever come true. Shailendra just wants to continue drowning in his shell to meet his parents' expectations..

> *"Tenang aja, aku nggak akan pernah mengatakan yang sebenarnya kepada kalian. Biarkan ini jadi urusanku aja. Kalian nggak perlu tahu. Aku akan tetap menjadi anak laki-laki satu-satunya yang Papa dan Mama banggakan."* (P. 277)

3.2.2. Shailendra and His Trust Issues

Shailendra and his closed-off personality continued to make him feel unsafe around people close to him, even with his closest friends. He was literally under the shadow of his nightmares. This is portrayed through the strong-heartedness of Shailendra, who although known for his gentle nature, can explode if his privacy is disturbed. *"Lo nggak denger pas gue bilang jangan buka-buka handphone gue?" "Gue tanya, lo denger nggak waktu gue bilang jangan buka handphone gue?"* (P. 116). For him, even the smallest actions can reveal his entire secret. "*Bagaimana kalau tadi bubble chat darinya masuk? Bagaimana kalau Zio membacanya? Lebih parahnya lagi, bagaimana kalau dia mengirimkan foto dan Zio nggak sengaja melihatnya?" (P. 117).*

Shailendra feels that his actions to shut down and be cautious are the best way to protect those around him from disappointment.

> *"Lo nggak tahu rasanya jadi anak yang bisa jadi kekecewaan terbesar buat orangtuanya! Lo nggak tahu rasanya mau pacaran aja harus sembunyi-sembunyi! Gue kayak gini buat Arjuna juga! Lo nggak tahu apa rasanya nggak bisa bebas mencintai seseorang sampai harus kabur ke luar negeri agar bisa hidup bersama orang yang lo sayangi, Yo. Lo nggak tahu apa-apa tentang kami."* (P. 251)

Shailendra, fundamentally, is just an ordinary person who wants to live freely to love and be loved by whoever he wants. However, once again, conservative society prevents him from experiencing that freedom. "I loved him so much it would kill me if my parents knew I wanted to

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spend the rest of my life with a man." (P. 254)

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In conclusion, Shailendra's journey in *Happy Ending Machine* clearly demonstrates the profound impact of a conservative society and homophobic parents on individuals trying to navigate the complexities of their queer identities. The obvious fear of societal judgment, showed by Shailendra's closeted persona and deep-seated trust issues, reflects the challenging reality faced by many queer individuals in a society heavy with traditional values. The constant struggle to balance the true self with societal expectations takes its toll on Shailendra's mental and physical health, which emphasizes the urgent need for societal acceptance and understanding. The novel serves as a reminder of the complexities inherent in the intersection between personal identity and societal norms, urging for a more inclusive and compassionate society that embraces diversity where everyone can love and be loved without fear of judgment or discrimination.

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