

The Discourse of “Failed” Women: A Critical Reflection Toward Standards of Happiness in Indonesian Society

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Abstract

The dominant standard of happiness in Indonesia is still rarely discussed as a crucial issue that oppresses, exploits, and excludes women. In that case, ideal happiness places a burden on women to play and fulfill their role in society. Instead of being critical, most women preserve the image of ideal women which is driven by the intersection of patriarchy, colonialism, feudalism, capitalism, and binary thought. The intersection of oppressive ideologies creates psychological and emotional torture for other women who are considered different or do not fit in with the standards (failed). The restrictions on space and social pressure are increasingly burdening women, creating emotional tension that produces specific lingering feelings (affects). This study discusses the contribution of queer-feminist knowledge in forming women's knowledge to understand and accept their subtle experiences as those who are considered to be failures and how they create strategies to deal with society's standards of happiness. This research was conducted by combining textual analysis (Instagram's posts) and empirical research (in-depth interview and testimonials) of urban women who live in Yogyakarta, Bali, Seoul, and Singapore. By using the affect theory approach and queer-feminist thinking, this research aims to distribute queer-feminist knowledge in intervening concepts and standards of happiness in Indonesian society that marginalize and perpetuate oppression toward women.

Keywords: failed women; happiness; affect theory; queer-feminist thinking

Introduction

The Relevance of the Happiness Concept and the Role of Indonesian Women

We write this study with the feminist consciousness inherited after two decades of Reformation. The Suara Ibu Peduli movement, led by educated middle-class women in 1998, has contributed to reviving the women's movement that had "turned" in the practice of state

ibuism (Suryakusuma, 2011). Of course, we understand that the word "mother" is always political, but the legacy of mothers who speak out has influenced gender discourse and awareness so that the next generation of women can more freely enter public spaces without fear. Support for the advancement of Indonesian women also received a breath of fresh air during the reign of President Abdurrahman Wahid, who had inherited gender mainstreaming (PUG) in the early 2000s, so various government policies were encouraged to have a gender perspective (affirmative action).

Then, what happened after two decades of the Suara Ibu Peduli movement? What has been the legacy of gender mainstreaming policies? Let's look at the profile of Indonesian women. Data from the National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) in 2020 states that in the field of education, the percentage of the female population who never went to school and did not graduate from elementary school is higher than that of men. Meanwhile, at the high school level, it can be seen that the male population who graduated from high school/equivalent was 31.88% higher than the female population with a large gap of 26.32%. In the field of higher education, there is still a gap between men and women in pursuing higher education in STEM fields. The percentage of male residents who have higher education diplomas in STEM fields is 33.91% while women are 29.41%. This can be influenced by cultural and environmental factors that keep girls away from science and technology since childhood. Science and technology that use logic are categorized as the domain of men, as logical beings. As a result, many women, both children; and adults; assume that technology and science are not suitable for them as feeling beings.

While the percentage findings are good, it is important to critically analyze them. *Firstly*, poverty still affects access to basic education in particular. *Secondly*, the disparity may be due to the fact that the calculation of education level figures also includes the adult and elderly population because women did have limited access to education facilities in the past. After more than twenty years of reform, at least the gross enrollment rate (APK), net enrollment rate (APM), and school enrollment rate (APS) have been relatively balanced with a gap of no more than 3% between men and women.

If the benchmark is education, then it can be explained that the number of educated women is much higher today than in the past. This means that there have been major changes brought about in feminist knowledge, the women's movement, and government gender mainstreaming policies. However, the women's movement still has a lot of work to do. The baton of the women's movement must be passed on to the current generation. One way is by

encouraging women to be active in public participation. In the field of formal and informal employment, the percentage of the population working in the formal sector is 39.53% and the informal sector is 60.47%. Although the pattern of men and women is the same, namely the formal sector is smaller than the informal sector, the percentage of male workers who work in the formal sector is higher than that of women. Conversely, the percentage of female workers employed in the informal sector is higher than that of male workers.

These data raise another question. If the number of educated women is increasing, then why is it that when they enter the workforce, this number decreases? Why has women's participation in the informal sector increased? The findings show that the cause of the disappearance of educated women from the formal workforce is that when they enter into marriage, women prioritize their family and choose to take care of the family. The roles of wife and mother are delegated to women and they have to choose. Even if they choose to work in the formal sector, women's work is also not practically smooth. Tjiptoherijanto (2012) found multi-faced discrimination against women in the formal sector. For example, female civil servants have less opportunity to advance to the management level than male civil servants, even though their productivity is the same. In addition, women who have families experience a double burden, namely being required to be productive in the office and having to take care of their families with excellence. Sexist views that manifest in discriminatory actions usually begin with the assumption that women will not focus on the office because they will take care of their families. However, if a woman prioritizes work in the office, then she can be considered an ambitious woman who does not care about her family. Ambitious women are a manifestation of empowered women and patriarchy dislikes ambitious women because they are considered a threat in the public sphere. With limited options, there are women who still choose to work, but some then decide to become housewives. The class perspective also makes a difference. For those who still need financial security, many of them end up doing their own business at home, which is seen as an improvement in the informal sector. This is a common situation Indonesian women face in cities and villages.

Table 1. Percentage of Population 15 Years and Over Who Are Employed by Sector of Employment, Sex, and Type of Region 2020

Tipe Daerah/Jenis Kelamin	Sektor Pekerjaan		Total
	Formal	Informal	
Perkotaan			
Laki-laki	53,72	46,28	100
Perempuan	45,54	54,46	100
Laki-laki+Perempuan	50,51	49,49	100
Perdesaan			
Laki-laki	29,63	70,37	100
Perempuan	21,97	78,03	100
Laki-laki+Perempuan	26,59	73,41	100
Perkotaan+Perdesaan			
Laki-laki	42,71	57,29	100
Perempuan	34,65	65,35	100
Laki-laki+Perempuan	39,53	60,47	100

Sumber: Survei Angkatan Kerja Nasional (Sakernas) 2020

The direction of women's roles reminds us of the model of family privatization by the ruling class/bourgeoisie described by Moraletat (2009, 3-21). In this model, women are dictated to manage their private lives related to parenting and married life. Women are directed by institutions of social control to enter into legal marriages, procreate, live a domestic life, do housework, and educate children. This bourgeois class system directs women to enter into this "scenario" with the lure that if they enter into the system, then they get happiness or in the economic view as a guarantee of welfare for women. The statistics on women's education and employment as well as the exposure of the family privatization model made us wonder, do women choose the scenario of living as wives and mothers for the sake of their happiness or are they actually tricked into preserving a certain system? How important is it for women to be wives and mothers to be happy?

Social, economic, and political stability is often seen as the gateway to happiness. The next question is not "What is happiness?" We will not discuss the concept of happiness specifically in this paper. Instead, the data leads us to investigate the practice of happiness that has implications for women's lives. The concept of happiness in this paper is related to the concept of happiness from the economic view. John Maynard Keynes is one of the economists who created the concept of happiness as the liberation of humanity from economic problems to fulfill its material needs. For Keynes, after man is finished with his material affairs, he will face the real problem of using his freedom to enjoy life wisely. Keynes' idea of happiness is not the same as pleasure. Happiness is not the same as pleasure. For Keynes, happiness can be

associated with pain, and tragedy, but also with the fullness of life (Carabelli and Cendrini 2011).

Unfortunately, Keynes' vision did not go as smoothly as expected. This is due to the loss of ethics to have a good life, along with human greed. Happiness shifts its meaning and is capitalized on for profit. Happiness is no longer "living" but "fulfilling" and "having". The practice of happiness is then problematic because ideologically it leads people to meet standards by "having" or being consumptive in material and non-material needs. In order to keep the production process running well, it requires labor. At this point, the position of women becomes a "labor of love" who must not only compete in the labor market in the formal sector but also ensure that their households remain safe and happy.

Discussing happiness and women, Sara Ahmed, as one of queer-feminist thinker, in her book entitled *The Promise of Happiness* (2010, p.21) explains that happiness involves affect (to be happy one must be affected by something), intentionality (to be happy one must feel happy about something), and evaluation or judgment (being happy about something makes it a good thing). Herein lies the problem, this "good thing" is not purely independent of the intersection of the ideologies of patriarchy, capitalism, feudalism, colonialism, and binary thinking. Just because everyone is doing it, the industry takes that and commoditizes it: Live like this! Unfortunately, such a concept of happiness complicates the position of women in their lives.

Method

This paper uses queer-feminist thinking that gives us a lens to read women's happiness practices. The queer-feminist thinking is a combination of feminist thinking that analyse discrimination based on power relation between sexes (dominantly between men and women) and queer theories that critically investigate the dominance of heteronormativity and binary thinking in patriarchal society. In this context of happiness, if something is not good, it will bring unhappiness. The industrialization of happiness creates standards and uniformity, while in reality every woman's experience and knowledge are different. Women's lives are wrapped in the intersection of diverse ideologies. Then what about the women who are outside the conditions that are considered "happy"? Or women who have a different concept of happiness?

At this point, queer-feminist knowledge becomes the key to examining and investigating the extent to which various women deal with their situations and problems. Has

feminist consciousness been able to provide liberation and make Indonesian women independent in making decisions or is it only up to the opening of access to education and employment?

This study is the first step to challenge the discourse of "happiness standards" in Indonesia. We bring the spirit of *l'écriture féminine* initiated by Hélène Cixous (1976) that women should write about themselves and other women. Women's writing is an act of solidarity to bring diverse women's narratives and mobilize resistance to oppression. In this case, the oppression takes the form of marginalization which creates unhappiness.

This research is limited to looking at the general situation of urban women in Indonesia. In reality, to this day, the position of women is largely determined by patriarchal discourse that has a perspective on the existence of men. Women have identities as children, wives, and mothers. Her position as the moral guardian of the family and the bearer of happiness is crucial in preserving the happiness industry (Ahmed, 2010). Women's relationships and behavior also determine whether they meet the idealized societal standards. This research reads women's experiences from the perspective of "failure".

This research is an exploratory study using combination of methods. *Firstly*, textual analysis; we analyse Instagram's posts using hashtag #myhappiness in order to look what is the concept of happiness for most women. *Secondly*, we use empirical study by collecting testimonials from five different women (single and married) to get confirmation about the concept of happiness, recheck with the result of concept of happiness from Instagram. And the last, we conduct in-depth interview to five women who has different concept of happiness from common women. We, then, analyse the stories of these women which has different experiences and represent voices from women who considered "failed" because they are not fit in with gender construction as socially expected. The story of an unmarried woman, women with uncommon romantic relationships, a well educated woman who become stay at home wife, and a woman who has miscarriage are the representation of failed women in patriarchal society. The subjects of this research are Indonesian middle-aged women (28-40 years old) who have a basic understanding of about gender, highly education with different professions, and live in big city: Yogyakarta, Bali, Seoul, and Singapore. They share their stories of "failure" and strategies in dealing with the pressure from people. This research is confidential, so we will use alias name in this article. This study limited to a specific context of city, educational background, and community, therefore is not meant to be representative of Indonesia's diverse women.

Result and Discussion

Investigating the Discourse on "Happiness Standards" in Indonesia

Portraits of the basic criteria of Indonesian happiness can easily be found in everyday life. From brochures offering bank loans to images on social media. On bank loan brochures, there is usually a picture of a heterosexual couple, a father and mother, and a son and daughter. More than that, the family in the brochure displays a smiling face against the background of a house with modern minimalist architecture, and a car as a vehicle, and some brochures even add a picture of the Kaaba as a representation of the Hajj pilgrimage. The images of happiness also target different audiences, such as young people and the elderly. For young people, there are usually portraits of laughing faces because they have succeeded in becoming graduates. The elderly are also depicted smiling happily with a visual background of a cozy house full of flowers.



Picture 1. An example of a bank loan brochure. (left) A heterosexual couple and their dreams. (right) Higher education fees with a female model

The images on social media are no different. If you search for the hashtag kebahagiaan or hashtag bahagiaku on Instagram, you will find a collection of similar images. The hashtag happiness features many images of heterosexual couples in intimate poses such as hugging or leaning against each other. Many also display photos of heterosexual couples with their children in contemporary restaurants and tourist attractions. Some other pictures put up photos

of their children with the added description that children are a source of happiness. Not to forget the various pictures of wedding moments also adorned the hashtag.



Picture 2. Indonesian posts with “My Happiness” hashtag on Instagram.

Through this portrait, we are invited to understand the pattern of Indonesian society that associates happiness with very limited life choices. Happiness is envisioned as being in a certain state that is considered promising, even when it has not yet happened: a state where one is married; has children/family; is economically established. The standard of happiness

can be contextually present depending on culture and environment or through mass-popularized fairy tales.

In the context of gender construction, Karolus (2013) investigates the female happiness shaped by Disney in *Snow White* in the 1930s. She found that the concept of the ideal woman is closely tied to the domestic world and hegemonic standards of femininity, such as passivity, submissiveness, meekness, and "waiting" to be rescued by the prince. In contrast, women who have power, either through magic as a symbol of knowledge or public office (queens or witches) are portrayed as evil, spiteful, and end up perishing at the end of the story. In real life, the savior prince is embodied by the man who asks for marriage. Disney in that era reproduced the concept that marriage is a happy ending. A married woman is a successful woman because she fulfills the ideal standard of femininity. On the other hand, unmarried women do not meet the standard of femininity because they are considered too independent (masculine). Masculine women are considered dissidents. A dissident is a person who is considered evil (as opposed to a feminine woman who is considered good). Dissident women threaten the standard of happiness.

Women are also faced with standards of happiness exposed by patriarchal ideology. The concept of women's happiness in patriarchal culture is when she is able to make people outside of herself happy and sacrifice. A study on vaginal rejuvenation by Betyarini (2021) found that some women feel they find happiness and satisfaction when they carry out their bodily functions as mothers who are able to conceive and give birth normally. The study also found that some women believe that a tight vagina is able to make their husbands happy in bed, thus creating happiness in their household. The findings emphasize how women's happiness is closely related to fulfilling their roles as ideal wives and mothers according to patriarchal concepts. Similar stories of women's domestication have been discussed in depth by classic feminists including Simon de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. According to de Beauvoir (1956, 415), marriage is a destiny traditionally offered to women by society so it is not surprising that most women are divided into being married, having been married, planning to marry, or suffering from being unmarried.

In the case of celibate women whether by choice of religious or ideological conviction, defiance, or trauma, the choice to marry remains questionable. Friedan (2001, 1963) came up with the concept of "feminine mystique" to describe the patriarchal power that brainwashes women into believing that their only happiness is when they successfully fulfill their femininity. Women are convinced that to fulfill the scenario of being a "woman" in

society is to be a good daughter, a good woman, a good wife, and a good mother. This idea of the feminine mystique captivates women so that they feel guilty and selfish if they do not choose to take care of their families. The patriarchal ideology at work in this feminine mystique concept makes women feel bad when they think about themselves. As a result, women survive and feel "alive" when they fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. Karolus & Anisah (2018) found that even women who call themselves feminists when explaining the concept of love and relationships are still stuck in penis envy, that women have a void and that void still wants to be "filled" by men.

Couples, marriages/households, children/families, and homes become objects of desire that are passed on as happiness from generation to generation like a fairy tale. So it should not be surprising that during holiday gatherings, we often encounter questions such as "Where is your boyfriend?", "When are you getting married?" or "When are you pregnant?". Often these questions are asked of women followed by the statement that as a woman it is not good to be too independent. Women will be better off if they get married soon and after marriage, they should get pregnant. This is what Ahmed (2010, 26) says is the consequence of following the instrument of the object of happiness. Something is good and has value as a good thing, as long as it leads to that happiness. It is as if, if we follow what they suggest, we will find happiness. To be, a happy woman, it is as if a woman must be dependent on her partner, must be a wife, and be able to produce children.

Another factor is the influence of social networking media. Entertainment from social networking media leads us to enjoy showing our own lives and watching other people's lives. This activity then unconsciously shapes netizens to compare their own lives with other people's lives. Jealousy and insecurity are human. Here, technology only accelerates the emergence of affect or feelings that are specific and commonly experienced in the long run. These affects are not always positive. There are affects that bring up disturbing (negative) feelings. Guy Debord (2002) sees that communication technology and industrial capitalism have created a society of spectacle based on relations that can be materialized in the form of images. These images shape people's references to practicing happiness.

Unconsciously, this is what most young Indonesian women talk about. In get-togethers, conversations about who got married to whom, how the wedding was, who just got pregnant and had a child, or who just succeeded in achieving something or having something turn out to compartmentalize people in the binary boundaries of "success" and "failure". The closer one is to the standard of happiness, the more successful one is. Conversely, the further

away from that standard one is, the more one is said to be a failure. In a patriarchal society, contestation creates winners and losers and most people don't want to be called or feel like failures. At this point, people start proving themselves and doing everything possible to be "happy".

Feminist Killjoys and the Prison Named "Happiness"

In this section, we will analyze our findings from the data collection process using the queer-feminist frames of Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant. These two queer-feminist thinkers developed affect theory to show how emotions, feelings, and affect are interchangeable and manifest in social, economic, political, and cultural relations and decisions. In this section, we will understand the interplay between happiness-creating standards and those standards being propagated and affecting collectivities. The goal is for people to be happy by living up to the standard. Interestingly, this section will offer the concept of feminist killjoys, which is considered to kill fantasy and sabotage the concept of happiness order. This concept is reversed as a critical solution to understand how happiness is discussed to justify a concept by certain groups to be understood as good.

Previously, we have presented the findings of the concept of happiness through the search for happiness hashtags. If we look closely, we will find that most of the hashtag users are women. If observed more intently, the findings of social media searches show that women's happiness narratives are dominated by wives who obey religious rules and social norms, fulfill maternal values, and are able to make their partners happy. Such narratives of happiness were also found in some of the women we interviewed when asked what makes them happy.

Below are their testimonials:

Table 2. Discourse on women's Happiness

NO.	Name	Age	Status	Happiness Concept
1.	Hasnah	28 years old	Married	"I am happy when I can make my family happy (my mother, my father, my husband, and sister). Perhaps my source of happiness is my family. I feel relieved when they are not sad or live in unfortunate situations.
2.	Bertha	30 years old	Married	"My family is healthy. We can gather, we live in harmony, and we can fulfill our needs.

3.	Retno	31 years old	Single	“My family lives in peace, helping each other, and supporting each other with love.”
4.	Tika	37 years old	Married	“When we can gather with our family and having our ‘me time’.”
5.	Gita	30 years old	Married	“I feel happy when I can fulfill all my works and doing it with my heart. “

In the table above, it is clear that most women's concept of happiness lies in the happiness of others. Four of the five quotes explain that their concept of happiness lies in the family. Ahmed (2010) provides an understanding of how family can influence happiness and become the object of a child's happiness. Family can create an intimate feeling of togetherness when we know what other family members like, then familiarize ourselves and share what they like. Intimacy comes when we do not just like what family members like, but we incorporate it as our happiness. We start living the things the family likes as a true lifestyle, making it an obligation until we feel comfortable continuing it. Ultimately, a good child should place his or her happiness expectations on the same things that his or her parents expect (Ahmed, 2010, 45-48).

In contrast to the four subjects, Nina, a 39-year-old single woman who works as a lecturer at one of the state universities in Yogyakarta, describes her happiness as follows: *"What makes me happy is, first, if I am able to be free/not dependent on something, either material or non-material. Secondly, if I am able to strive to the last limit (Nina, Year)."* The distinction between Nina's view of happiness and several other women lies in her awareness of not following other people's concepts of happiness and not trying to make others happy. A woman with a different concept of happiness is often perceived as a joy killer in a sense: they interfere with other people's fantasies and sabotage their happiness. The difference is even read as unhappiness (Ahmed, 2010).

Sara Ahmed offers the concept of feminist killjoys as a resistance to the concept of happiness that is placed on others. For feminist killjoys, awareness and liberation are much needed rather than the narrow teachings of happiness. The opening of access for women to education has opened up opportunities for women to gain liberation, both in the private and public spheres. However, is it true that education is able to foster women's awareness to

celebrate their freedom and choose their own path of happiness? Let's look at the stories of these women.

a. Deedee and Nina's Story: Compromise and Negotiation

This is the story of Deedee (31 years old). Deedee is a highly educated woman who graduated from abroad, is married, and has a child. Approximately 6 years after marriage, Deedee followed her husband Galang (31 years old) who continued his doctoral education and then worked abroad. Financially, Deedee was well off. At first glance, Deedee's life was almost perfect and considered successful. Problems arise when Deedee interacts with her old friends. Although she was considered successful in the domestic sphere, Deedee was also expected to excel in the public sphere. When she didn't have a career in the public sphere, people started to ridicule her and it hurt Deedee. This condition made Deedee sad. However, the support of her husband and family made Deedee feel like she had a support system.

At first, Deedee's dream was to volunteer with the United Nations in conflict zones or become a lecturer. In reality, Deedee was married and her partner was pursuing his career. So, Deedee was faced with circumstances beyond her control. With her dream, Deedee realized that she could not realize her dream without sacrificing her family. Deedee inherently restricts herself because she already believes that the ideal concept of family is a family that must live together in one house. In the sexual hierarchy, heteronormativity shapes the ideal family as one that consists of a man and a woman, is monogamous, has children, engages in conventional sexual relations, and lives in one house (Rubin 1984). Other relationships that do not meet any of these standards are ranked next. The further away from that standard, the less ideal it is considered.

Deedee is a woman with a gender perspective. She is aware of the repression of various oppressive ideologies. However, she also realizes that she still relies on traditional gender constructions. Deedee's story makes us realize the "unwillingness" to let go of traditional standards of happiness. However, we also understand that Deedee's reality is a real experience of women negotiating and compromising to have a bargaining position. In Deedee's case, she eventually projected her dreams and made her husband's career a shared goal. She encouraged her husband to have a great career as compensation for the sacrifices he had made. She was also involved in the decision about which country Galang would travel to for career development. Deedee realized that she had limited space and as a way to combat this, she had to change the direction of her dreams. *"When life gives you lemons, you make*

lemonade. This is my way to make lemonade. I have reached the acceptance stage because I've been stuck down there for so long," she said.

Deedee's story is different from Nina's. Nina is also highly educated and is currently studying for her doctorate at a prestigious public university in Indonesia. Financially, Nina is also well-off, which does not make her dependent on others. The more attachment one has to something or someone, the less independent one becomes. In contrast to Deedee, Nina is still single. She decided to live her life by opening up opportunities between marriage or not getting married. *"I never said I would not get married, but it is strange that people think of me as choosing not to get married,"* she said with a laugh.

In Nina's case, she negotiated the idealized view of women getting married. Nina builds self-defense by becoming a financially empowered woman. According to Nina, financial strength will make people reluctant to interfere with her life. In her existence in the public sphere, Nina turned out to bring out the concept of femininity that was originally glorified in the domestic sphere to the public sphere. Nina sees her existence as meaningful through her work as an educator. For Nina, teaching is feminine. The value of femininity is still perpetuated by Nina in the public sphere such as sensitivity, holding noble values, honesty, and integrity. She also still carries religious values as her standard. The aspect of religiosity is an important part of Nina as a guide in her life. Deedee and Nina both faithfully walk in the path given by outsiders (both ideology and religious values). Deedee and Nina's awareness is compliance to remain a good daughter. Good girls do not break the rules. This is in line with Ahmed's idea that we live the things that the family likes as the right pattern of life and in the end, a good daughter should put her hope of happiness in the same thing that her parents expect (Ahmed, 2010, 45-48).

Berlant (2011) criticizes the psychosocial condition of people who continue to rely on the dominant standard of happiness. She calls it "cruel optimism". In this concept, people keep attaching themselves to the object of desire constantly in order to keep receiving the promise of happiness. Although, it turns out that after falling into that standard they are still faced with a normative life that still provides instability, unpredictability, and impossibility. Most people who practice this cruel optimism lose their ability to be "free" because they are still playing safe within the "boundaries" that outsiders have created for them. They are still afraid to find their own happiness because they are actually still held hostage to the standards of happiness made by others. The reason they don't want to let go of that standard is that it will bring "negative" things. This is where queer-feminist thinking reverses a life that is considered

"negative" as the courage to break away from a life that does not give fullness while celebrating what is lived (Berlant and Edelman 2014).

b. Killjoys Women's Story: Aditi, Bernadette, and Monita

Aditi (33 years old) is a highly educated woman, married, and active in various organizations that focus on issues of gender justice and sexuality. Aditi is a survivor of sexual violence. For her, happiness is when she goes through various processes to survive and share the knowledge she has gained with the community or people in need. Despite being married and an activist, Aditi is still considered a failure by those around her. Aditi married at the age of 31, which is considered past the ideal age of marriage for Indonesian women. Not only that, Aditi's choice to delay pregnancy is considered a form of going against nature by her colleagues and some of her family. *"When I told people close to me that I was going to postpone my pregnancy, their faces immediately changed and they said my choice was not good. Then I explained that there are many studies that state that women need to prepare their bodies and mentality before getting pregnant,"* Aditi said. Despite being considered deviant, Aditi stuck to her stance based on her knowledge of body rights and sexuality. Aditi's awareness is in line with the feminist concept that women's liberation from the restrictive discourse of body and sexuality begins with women's awareness of alienation from their own bodies and sexuality (Thornham, 2010).

In her activism, Aditi is classified as having a fairly wide network. Although her partner Ello (34 years old) is gender-perspective and supportive of Aditi's activities, Ello's family is less supportive and considers Aditi's activities unimportant. Ello comes from a Javanese aristocracy that sees sons as symbols of patriarchal power. His extended family has high expectations of Ello as the first grandson and first male child to be able to continue the lineage and maintain the family breed. He is also expected to be able to direct his partner to follow the prevailing family "rules". For Ello's family, Aditi's activism on issues of sexuality and gender diversity is considered not within the corridors of propriety of their noble standards. Her profession, which is not in the formal sector, also distinguishes her from other daughters-in-law who have professions such as public relations, accountants, and doctors. Apart from having professions in the public sector, the other daughters-in-law are also mothers who have "successfully" given birth to children. Aditi's decision to be "different" and not in line with the rules in Ello's extended family, often made her an outcast in family

conversations. However, the treatment she received did not change her choice to remain active in the organization.

The next female killjoy is Bernadette (31 years old). Bernadette is a highly educated woman and works as a civil servant in one of the ministries. Bernadette's happiness lies in her deep understanding of herself and others when she can grow and realize her aspirations to continue fighting for humanity. Although in the public sphere, Bernadette is considered successful, in the domestic sphere, she is considered a failure because her life choices are different from most heterosexual women. Bernadette has a unique relationship with her partner Indra (36 years old). Although Indra and Bernadette are committed to a long-term partnership, if it is not legalized by law (custom, religion, and state), then Bernadette and Indra's relationship is still considered not to have a "legal bond" to be called a family.

The decision wasn't unreasonable. Indra and Bernadette both have idealism and are committed to the humanitarian field so on that basis and consciously they did not choose the relationship model of marriage and having children. *"Our commitment is to accompany each other to face their respective worlds without having to always merge,"* explained Bernadette. Marriage would tend to make them unable to maximize their efforts in their fields. "I'm not against marriage, but I don't rely on the concept of marriage as the only form of relationship," she says. Indra has traveled extensively and is currently overseas involved in humanitarian work. While in her homeland, Bernadette nurtures various communities and provides assistance for victims of violence.

As a relationship grows, couples often experience turbulence in an effort to find a balance point that works together. Bernadette, who is a feminist, then uses feminist knowledge to find feminist consciousness and invite Indra to develop a broader and more fluid concept of relationships. Bernadette practiced the feminist social justice conceptualized by Seyla Benhabib, which was originally in the public sphere to the private sphere. In the process, Bernadette and Indra have a moral conversation that recognizes and actively engages both of them. Bernadette learns to understand Indra's experience as a man and Indra learns to understand Bernadette's experience as a woman. According to Benhabib, dialog that aims to achieve justice must be accompanied by ideas of solidarity, friendship, love, and care (Boang Manalu, 2021). Bernadette and Indra then work together to process to find an understanding of themselves and their relationship. Both then seek their own standards of happiness and discover the purpose of a relationship that is broader than just a normative marriage.

Finally, we share the story of Monita (33 years old). Monita is a female pastor and is currently continuing her postgraduate studies abroad. Like most religious leaders, Monita has an honorable position in society, especially in her family and congregation. The situation changes when Monita develops a relationship with Valerin (35 years old), a cancer survivor. Monita and Valerin's relationship invites controversy on two levels, her own family and congregation. For them, Monita is a pastor who is the perfect figure to fulfill their expectations. Therefore, Monita's partner must be someone who has the power to be able to support Monita to realize their hopes. *"For me, it is politics, because there is a measure that then becomes an economic transaction. That is not a humanizing relationship,"* she said. Valerin's physical condition is considered a weakness and as a result, Valerin is considered incompatible with Monita, and their relationship is often considered not ideal.

In her struggle, Monita came face to face with sexism and the strong pressure to fulfill the "heteronormativity scenario". She realizes that when a woman has an important role in society, she must have a partner who also has an important position or position. Her partner's illness was seen as a weakness because he could not complete Monita, so Monita was seen as "lame". As a result, people pity Monita and see this as unhappiness. Conversely, if it is the woman who is sick, then the man is considered stronger, idealized, and even called a hero for successfully bearing the burden of his partner. Discriminatory views in public spaces such as female civil servants or female workers also affect Monita. As a female pastor, Monita was discredited because it was thought that she would prioritize Valerin as her future husband over her ministry duties. She is considered not to bring benefits to the church.

c. "Unhappy Queer": Resistance and Reflection of "Failed" Women on the Standard of Happiness

According to Ahmed (2010:90), heterosexual love is about the possibility of a happy ending. To be happy, the standards set by the dominant system promise happiness to everyone who can fulfill them. Someone who is considered a "failure" should not be the reason for other people's unhappiness, so many "failures" decide to fulfill the standard so that they will not be the cause of other people's unhappiness. Here, feminist knowledge and queer theory collaborate with each other to take risks against the dominant standard (Ahmed, 2010: 91). In that process, emotional turbulence is bound to occur, whether with guilt, disappointment, sadness, or anger. Affect, emotion, or feeling informs the body to understand injustice and oppression.

Aditi

Aditi's queer story began when she and Ello found out they were pregnant outside of sexual planning. The pregnancy changed their understanding of the maternal process. They enjoyed and fell in love with the process. However, in the end, Aditi suffered a miscarriage. Aditi and Ello had to face the stigma that they had failed to look after their future baby. An even worse stigma was placed on Aditi as a pregnant woman. Various implicit accusations showered her as a woman who did not have a motherly spirit and was unable to care for her future fetus. After the miscarriage, in the process of physical and mental recovery, Aditi had to face the fact that she was treated unfairly by her two in-laws. *"So my common-law wife, let's call her Puput, did something disrespectful about my miscarriage. I reacted to that. In a conversation with my husband and in-laws, I explained my reasons for reacting to Puput and asked my in-laws for understanding my traumatic condition after the miscarriage. Surprisingly, I was asked to relent and understand on the grounds that Puput also had a trauma,"* Aditi explains. Later, Aditi learned that her in-laws' decision was due to their affection for Puput's child. The forgiveness of her parents-in-law was based on Puput's condition as the mother of their grandchildren. *"Yes, my parent-in-law openly wanted to prioritize Puput. My father-in-law even said that if they met us, he would hug Puput tighter than he hugged me. In the group chat, she also got more attention, especially when sending photos of their children."* Aditi said with a slight stammer.

In the midst of the process of surviving a miscarriage, Aditi and Ello struggled to come to terms with their "failure". Aditi and Ello started all over again, from preparing themselves as future parents; to pregnancy programs; to investigating their intentions to have children. Unfortunately, Aditi and Ello's process was not appreciated by Ello's family. Aditi's condition is further minimized by the contestation between in-laws because the latter is superior as a person who works in the formal sector and has successfully had and cared for children. Aditi was discriminated against and decided to fight back using feminist knowledge. Her introduction to queer theory helped her understand the marginalization in her family because she was "different". Aditi eventually learned that her baby was considered non-existent (a spirit) and because it did not exist, it was not recognized. To comfort Aditi, Aditi's parents-in-law offer Puput's child pictures, to help Aditi forget her child. Aditi and Ello's wounds are ignored. The long-term effect is that because Aditi and Ello don't have children, their happiness is considered incomplete. Aditi experiences emotional turbulence of sadness, anger, and disappointment, as the burden of reproduction is placed on her womb. She realizes

that her family-in-law is questioning her ability to give children and subsequently give happiness to Ello. Queer-feminist knowledge has helped Aditi come to terms with her condition of failure and turn that failure into works that challenge the standards of happiness.

Bernadette

The queer love and relationship between Bernadette and Indra that does not lead to marriage is then considered a failure and therefore ultimately unrecognized by those closest to her. First, as a woman, she was considered a failure because she did not fulfill the scenario of being a good daughter, wife and mother. Secondly, Bernadette's existence, which is seen as single despite actually having a long-term committed partner, is still considered a threat and is often pitied. One of these is the tension that arises when in Indra's circle, Bernadette is considered to have the potential to "take" Indra so that it will cause Indra to leave his profession. Conversely, in Bernadette's circle, Indra was not considered an ideal partner because he was rarely physically present to protect and fulfill Bernadette's needs. People saw Bernadette's independence as something to be pitied for because there was no partner to protect and look after her. The same pity exists for unmarried and widowed women.

Bernadette's strategy is to practice queer-feminist theory in understanding her difference and her relationships. The manifestation of queer-feminist thought comes in action and ethics. She must not only re-understand herself, but also learn to understand Indra, and also give understanding to her friends. When her friends remain unwilling to understand, Bernadette takes the ethical action to "let go" in the sense of accepting and appreciating the differences in her and her friends' perspectives. Bernadette did not regret the process even though she experienced disappointment and confusion with her friends. Instead, she found a new understanding and perspective to get to know herself, her partner, and her friends better. As a bonus, she formed relationships that others may never have thought existed. Being different is Bernadette's way of fighting uniformity.

Monita

In her relationship with Valerin, Monita learns that people are unique and because they are unique, their relationships and methods are also unique. In her relationship with Valerin, her concept of happiness slowly changed. Monita used to follow the standard of happiness that most people believe in, but the concept of happiness has changed. Through Valerin's struggle as a cancer survivor who lives unlike ordinary people, she discovered that

being happy is not because of others, but comes from the depths of oneself. Monita realized that happiness is not merely about material things, but satisfaction in the way of thinking and having a better perspective on life. She radically invites us to fight the mindset that still discriminates against people and judges character rather than physical condition.

In the process, Monita experienced a lot of emotional turbulence. As Valerin's partner, Monita also faced toxic masculinity in Valerin. *"He's always there when I ask for help, but he never tells me when he's in trouble. This sometimes makes me feel like I'm not being relied on as a partner by him. It's like there's a distance,"* she says. Just like Bernadette's story, because the perpetrators were the closest people, Monita felt disappointed and sad because the people closest to her were not supportive. They wanted Monita to be happy because they followed their standards of happiness. They thought Monita would be unhappy if she didn't live up to that standard. However, she was eventually able to accept and understand the limitations of those closest to her in understanding her relationship with Valerin. Monita has criticized the materialistic lifestyle and way of thinking of modern humans today, *"What is pursued is how to fulfill the need to eat, etc., not to get to know each other as individuals,"* she said. *"Sometimes I feel alone in this journey. We have to change this situation. What we need is dialog,"* Monita concluded.

Deedee

To make peace with her situation and herself, Deedee negotiated. The process was not easy. She often felt guilty when she was unable to fulfill her responsibilities. Deedee and Galang agreed that in their family, both parties have equal responsibilities so that if problems occur, they are responsible for both. Deedee refuses to say that it is her partner who complicates her position. According to her, Galang is very supportive of Deedee if she wants to continue her studies or work in the formal sector. The real obstacle is Deedee herself. *"I feel guilty if I have to sacrifice my family,"* she said. So, Deedee chose to create a strategy that suited her situation. She tries to find loopholes in the limited space she faces. With more free time, Deedee can focus on her children's education and growth, which she believes would be difficult if she worked in the formal sector. In between, Deedee looks for activities that support her development. For example, by joining recitations or volunteering for elderly groups and mental health awareness campaigns.

Nina

Nina said that there was a time when people questioned her decision to remain unmarried. Nina was happy to explain the situation. However, Nina also realized that it seemed that Nina's answer surprised these people. This reminds me of Ahmed's opinion, that happiness requires the acceptance of others, which ultimately creates a sense of comfort. Conversely, the condition of the other creates a sense of discomfort. To be happy, humans need contrast. Nina's condition as a single person shows that married life is considered much happier. In fact, Nina herself chose her path with full awareness. People no longer ask Nina about marriage because Nina's answers present awkwardness. Nina rejects that the single life should be pitied, *"Single is not to be pitied. It's not a sad thing,"* she explains. This is in line with Nina's concept of happiness to be free and independent of everything. For Nina, dependence can create slavery.

Conclusion

In the two decades of Reformasi, women have made a lot of progress. Gender perspectives are slowly being included in education policies and curricula to create a young generation that is gender-aware and fair in life practices. It is undeniable that feminist thought has contributed the most in animating the struggle of the women's movement which is truly significant and beneficial for future generations.

The footsteps of the women's movement have given birth to a new generation of women who are smarter, braver, and more knowledgeable. We can see how young urban women in Indonesia are beginning to realize how to identify domestic and public spaces. Space is key for women to grow and develop their potential. In queer-feminist thinking, "space" is a place to live and breathe (Ahmed 2010). In this thinking, creating the widest possible space is a strategy of resistance.

Queer-feminist thinking is a fresh perspective to explore the increasingly complex issues of life today. Domestic and public spaces are melting and causing psychosocial tensions. With the increasing complexity of reality and the intersection of oppressive ideologies, queer-feminist thinking is a bridge to unite the fragmented gender equality movement. If the previous generation saw the feminist struggle only for women, then now the feminist struggle is for everyone with different experiences, be it different identities, relationships, and life choices.

Queer-feminist thinking also teaches women that there are many options for happiness that are not as narrow as patriarchal discourse. There are many strategies and power to fight discriminatory treatment. Inevitably, although this thinking has become increasingly popular, there are still women who feel comfortable in the “narrow space” of patriarchy. Some are still negotiating and compromising. There are also those who have the courage to break free from the shackles and struggle to create a spacious space. They are willing to learn from the shards and ruins of the dark experiences of sexual minorities, which turns out to provide freedom toward unlimited possibilities. Of course, women’s struggles are not over yet.

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