





Embracing Inclusiveness: Islamic Community Perception of Homosexual Identity in Monster Movie (2023)

Muhammad Restu Aji Parameswara¹  and Tsuroyya Tsuroyya¹ 

¹ Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
tsuroyya@unesa.ac.id

Abstract. This study highlights how perceptions of a Muslim student community known as UKKI at a public university toward homosexual identity in “Monster” movie. The data presented in this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with members of UKKI. The results of the interviews were analyzed using the reception analysis method, in which the researchers grouped the audience's reception into three groups: dominant, negotiation, and opposition; and analyzed why they belonged to each group. The result showed that the majority of informants are able to interpret the LGBT values conveyed in the movie *Monster* (2023), which proves that people with a spiritual community background are also sensitive and able to understand the existence of LGBT people in the social environment. The study contributes to media, gender, and interfaith dialogue scholarships, in particular that it debunks the stereotype of Muslim community being conservative toward LGBT group. Future research on the effectiveness of similar movies in promoting inclusivity toward LGBT group to a certain religious community is worth investigating.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Islamic Community, Film, Inclusiveness.

1 Introduction

As of 2023, the number of LGBT people is estimated to reach 7% worldwide, 4% of whom classify themselves as bisexual and the rest as homosexual [1]. Currently, the conversation sexual orientation is still a taboo topic and considered controversial to common people. In Indonesia, same-sex relationships are still viewed negatively because Indonesia is one of the countries that upholds heteronormative norms [2].

Despite criticism from various parties, the LGBT community remains actively committed to advocating for its right using various platforms including films. In general, films are a form of mass communication which provides information to large audiences through audio-visual images. As a mass communication medium, films transmit messages to educate, entertain, or influence the audience persuasively. These goals are often influenced by social realities and ideologies that filmmakers want to communicate. As part of media, films also play a representative role, that is, films are expected to be able to convey specific information so as to form an understanding to the audience [3]. Films that contain LGBT issues require more effort in packaging them so that people are able to accept and enjoy these films comfortably [4]. One of

challenges in LGBT films is to improve the depiction of homosexual characters. Shows that contain LGBT messages influence the audience greatly, including attitudes, behaviors, and mindsets due to their highly persuasive audio-visual nature [5].

Efforts to understand and accept minority communities such as LGBT people embody the value of inclusiveness. It involves rejecting discrimination against minorities in order to achieve well-being [6]. For students from gender minority groups, acceptance of themselves is essential to achieving well-being. Unfortunately, they are still often discriminated against, with adolescents from minority groups claiming to have difficulty accessing health services [7]. In addition, minority groups are still bullied, as evidenced by the consistently high number of bullying cases against LGBT students [8].

Currently, there are many movies that contain LGBT issues in them, one of which is the movie *Monster* (2023). Through the movie, Hirokazu Kore-eda received the prestigious award at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival in the *Queer Palm* category as well as the best screenplay. The researchers chose *Monster* (2023) as the object of research because of its interesting plot by telling the process of forming Minato's homosexual identity from various perspectives. In this study, researchers used the perspective of the audience from the Islamic community taking into account that Islam has a strict legal basis in regulating the relationship style of its people and strongly opposes homosexual behavior. The researchers want to investigate types and rationales of receptions formed by people who have been exposed to Islamic strict regulation of same-sex relationships when watching movies with homosexual concepts.

2 Methods

This research used a qualitative approach that aims to see how social reality is depicted in the movie through individual subjectivity. Data were collected through a series of in-depth interviews with several students who have watched “*Monster*” (2023) and join Islamic student organization, called UKKI at a public university, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (Unesa). Founded in 1988, UKKI has become the largest as well as the oldest religious based student organization at Unesa. UKKI influences greatly on how Muslim student perceive social and cultural issues including LGBT’s.

The researchers sorted the movie into several scenes that illustrate the ambiguity of homosexual values, so the interviews focused on these scenes to find out how the reception is formed. There were five scenes featuring homosexual identity in the movie. The data analysis process was carried out using the reception analysis method.

According to Stuart Hall [9], reception analysis highlights the individual process of interpreting and representing a message conveyed through mass communication media. The results of interpreting the message will be different for each person, this can occur due to the influence of one's background and experience. When an individual interprets a media message, he will position himself through three possible positions, namely the dominant, negotiation, and opposition. [9]. This method was chosen to explore the

audience's understanding in interpreting the process of homosexual identity formation contained in the film.

3 Results and Discussion

Table 1. Informant's Data.

Informant	Name	Sex	Major	Senior high school
1	N	Female	Communication Science	Islamic School
2	F	Female	Civics Education	Islamic School
3	TA	Female	Indonesian Literature	Islamic School
4	JA	Male	Economics	Public School
5	ME	Male	Biology	Public School

A person's background and experience affect how he perceives reality. In this study, informants have various backgrounds. Informant N comes from a family that upholds Islamic values. N claimed that she never interacted with the LGBT community. Informants F and TA also come from the same family and school background. F has never directly interacted with the LGBT community; he has only heard stories about LGBT. Meanwhile, TA claimed that she has close friends who are members of the LGBT community. Informants JA and Me come from families that do not adhere to Islamic teachings, and both have experiences in LGBT community interaction.

Based on the interviews conducted with five informants, the researchers analyzed the position of each informant in interpreting the depiction of the homosexual identity in *Monster (2023)* as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of audience positions.

Scenes	Dominant	Negotiation	Opposition
1	1,3,4,5	-	2
2	1,2,3,4,5	-	-
3	1,3,4	2,5	-
4	1, 3,4	-	2,5
5	1,4,5	-	2,3

In the first scene, it is shown how Minato and Yori chat intimately in the music room, until Yori unwittingly starts touching and playing with Minato's hair. At first Minato is not bothered by Yori's behavior, but over time he feels strange and brushes off Yori's hand.

"Yori just wanted to familiarize herself with Minato, expressing that she felt close and friends with him"

"Yori was grateful that someone was talking to her and befriending her, so I think Yori was playing with Minato's hair as a sense of pleasure and wanting to get closer to Minato"

Informants 1,3,4,5 are in the dominant position, they accept the codes implied in the scene. They agreed that Yori's actions reflect her excitement of being able to have deep talk with Minato. They also felt it is normal for a child to show enthusiasm through physical actions like Yori does.

"It's awkward because it's a schoolgirl and it happened in a school room"

However, informant 2 is in the oppositional position. While watching this scene, informant 2 did not feel comfortable and awkward because scenes like this are played by schoolgirls and occur at school, a public place. He also added that Yori's behavior does not reflect how close his relationship is.

The second scene shows when Minato tries to save Yori from being bullied by throwing his friends' belongings because at that time he did not want to be seen close to Yori.

"Minato throwing his friends' things was his spontaneous response to stop the bullying of Yori. He was trying to attract the attention of his friends so that Yori could avoid the unpleasant situation."

All informants are in the dominant position, they considered that Minato's actions are a reflection of his concern for Yori even though Minato's behaviors are improper. The informants suggested that children are often confused when they witness bullying, but they want to help at the same time. So, it was not uncommon for them to come up with alternative ways to stop bullying without being directly involved, and that was exactly what Minato did.

In the third scene, we can see how happy Minato and Yori were when spending time together in an old bus until they hugged each other tightly.

"The actions taken by Yori and Minato are quite ambiguous when viewed through non-verbal communication, so it is possible that at that time they already had feelings for each other"

Informants 1,3,4 are in the dominant position. To their views, what Yori and Minato did in that scene was ambiguous enough for ordinary friends. So, it could be assumed

that the two have started to have feelings for each other. It was reinforced by the way they looked at each other, which revealed more feelings between them.

"I've picked up that there's something strange and ambiguous about the actions of Yori and Minato, I am okay with that kind of relationship but what makes me uncomfortable when watching is that scenes like this are done by children. So it would be more comfortable to watch if this kind of action was done by people of a certain age."

While informants 2,5 are in the negotiation position, they admitted that it is an expression of affection. Yet, ages may become very crucial interpreting this scene. The older the artists, the greater opportunity to be widely accepted.

The fourth scene shows when Yori wrote Minato's name on her assignment entitled "Your Future Dream" and expressed his wish to be with Minato forever.

"Their feelings for each other have been validated. Yori's act of writing Minato's name on his assignment at that time was enough to show his desire to continue to be and grow with Minato until adulthood, What makes this scene depict a relationship more than friends is that this action was carried out by the two boys, and we know that men usually do not express things like this"

Informants 1, 3, 4 are in the dominant position where they interpret the code according to what is depicted in the movie. They viewed that the interactions between Minato and Yori do not show how male friendships are established. Their treatment of each other is considered too intimate for a friendship among boys, leading to an assumption that they were more than friends.

"At the age of children, it is possible to do something without thinking about it, so it is possible that Yori and Minato's actions at that time are just childish talk without any romantic spices considering their age"

While informants 2,5 are in the opposition position, they perceived that it is just mundane behavior done by children. At their age, children still have not developed their mindset yet. Thus, the decision they make is certainly unrealistic.

In scene five, Minato showed his concern for Yori, by visiting his house, but he was kicked out by Yori's father. Yori's father said that his son had recovered and fancied a girl. At first Yori supported this lie, but suddenly he hesitated and decided to tell Minato that everything was a lie.

"Yori's father seems to have known that his son develops same-sex feelings but he is against it, so he said his son is sick and try to reinforce heteronormativism to his son."

Informants 1,4,5 are in a dominant position where they captured the code that Yori's father indirectly confirms that his son likes boys. In this scene, Yori's father had spoken that his son had recovered and liked girls.

"I thought she was a boy, but it turned out to be wrong that she might actually be a girl, where in her condition if seen from the point of view in the scene of her house, her father did not accept her as a girl but wanted her as a boy"

Meanwhile, informants 2 and 3 are in the opposition position. Informant 2 assumed that Yori really had no interest in the same sex relationship according to what her father said. So informant 2 rejected that the two were still in a relationship until the end of the movie. Meanwhile, informant 3 had a new assumption that Yori is actually a woman who disguises herself as a man to be accepted by her father.

From the results of the analysis above, it is known that the majority of informants are in a dominant position, where informants are able to perceive a shared-meaning of homosexual identity in the movie.

The ability of the audience to understand the LGBT values in the film shows that they are sensitive and able to accept the existence of the LGBT community in a campus. In particular, audiences affiliated with Muslim student organizations share the idea of the LGBT community can coexist with others regardless of a strict Islamic regulation of relationship. This finding is paramount to the concepts of inclusiveness and well-being of students, particularly those belong to the LGBT community.

*"Actually, I'm fine with them, as long as they don't show it too much to the public"
"I'm not really bothered, but I might be a bit uncomfortable if they show their identity too explicitly"*

Informants 4 and 3 added that they were okay with LGBT people as long as they are secretive and discreet about their identities. The informants found LGBT community members egoist when they express their intimacy to the public.

In general, the results of this study support the research conducted by Paz Ellipe and his colleagues entitled "Bullying is bullying, if they want to say it's because of being LGBT that's another story: Perception of educators on LGBTQ+ Bullying" that bullying and rejection of LGBT people is commonly caused by their distinct behavior. "The more the victim looks different, the more likely the victim will be ostracized and rejected by society [8]."

4 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the majority of informants who come from the Islamic community are able to capture messages that contain homosexual values well without being influenced by Islamic strict regulation of relationship. In fact, this finding

debunks the stereotype that Muslims are very conservative when dealing with LGBT issues.

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