

# Family Identity in Indonesian Films (Interpersonal Communications between Fathers, Who are Transgender or Transsexual, and Their Children)

Ade Kusuma and Ririn Puspita

**Abstract—***Realita, Cinta, dan Rock n'Roll, and Lovely Man* are Indonesian drama films which have a similiar premise; a children relationship with his father who is a transgender or transsexual. Based on the narrative elements of both films, researchers analyse the interpersonal communications between fathers who are transgender or transsexual, and their children. Furthermore, this study aims to explore a shift in the concept of ideal family in Indonesian contemporary society. Family is the group where human learning about all things related to life for the first time. It has a major role to construct individual's identity. In Indonesian society, the ideal concept of family is related to the presence of a father, a mother, and children. Otherwise, *Realita, Cinta dan Rock n'Roll* and *Lovely Man* illustrated an opposite father figure.

**Index Terms—**Family, interpersonal communication, transgender, transsexual.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Today, Indonesian film production is experiencing a significant increase in quantities. It is followed by the presence of variety of themes and genres offered to audiences. Film not only serves as a medium of entertainment but also exposing social reality in a society which portrayed in director's perspective. Film create a new cultural statement. [1] Film as a medium to inform a social reality, thus be able to create a sense of caring, awareness and efforts to help solve various problems who had received less attention from the public.

Films which have a bravery to expose a taboo phenomenon in society are very interesting to study. Transgender is not new in Indonesian film. In the new orde era, several drama comedy has often show a transgender (tranvestite) character as a joke, such as comedy films which played by Dono, Kasino, and Indro (Warkop DKI). [2] Warkop DKI has produced several popular drama comedy films in the 80s.

*Realita, Cinta, dan Rock n'Roll* (*Reality, Love, and Rock n'Roll*), and *Lovely Man* were released after 2000. Both of the films have similiar premises, that is a children relationship with their fathers, who are transgender or transsexual. This research using textual analysis to interpret the film as a tangible reality that has and produce meaning. Based on the narrative elements of film, researchers analyze how the interpersonal communications between transgender or transsexual fathers and their children. Furthermore, this

study aims to explore a shift in the concept of ideal family in Indonesian society.

*Realita, Cinta, dan Rock n' Roll* (2006) tells the story of two teenagers, namely Nugi (played by Herjunot Ali) and Ipang (Vino G.Bastian) who have big dreams in becoming a rock n roll musician. His love of playing music distracted their achievement in school which eventually make their parents angry. One day, Nugi found out that his father (Barry Prima) is a transsexual. It make him disappointed because he has never imagined this before.

*Lovely Man* also tells story of transsexuality. The film was released in 2011 and on several awards in 6th Asian Film Festival, including the lead actor, Donny Damara who acted as a transgender, won as the best actor. *Lovely Man* tells the story of a brief encounter between Cahaya (Raihanun) and his father (Donny Damara) after being separated for 15 years. She never met her father as he left his family since Cahaya was 4 years old. Their meeting was brief which they talked some of the very meaningful things in their life, family and being a transgender.

## II. FAMILY REPRESENTATION IN *REALITA, CINTA, DAN ROCK N'ROLL, AND LOVELY MAN*

Family can be defined as a group of people who are bound to marriage or adoption, who have the commitment and live together to realize the goal of happiness together. According to Julia T.Wood in her book *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Interactions*; in the 1980s the majority of the American people assess the family as a couple of men and women who are married and have children. If there are couples without children, the community call it just as a couple, not a family.[3] In Indonesia, the definition of family is still closely associated with the presence of the father, mother, and child. When a child is only living with parents who are not married, or single parents it would appear the assumption that they are not an ideal family.

Globalization affect the shifting of family definition in some countries. It can change because the social conditions of the community also changes. Family is not just the presence of a father, mother, and child; but there is a role of parents and children. An example; single parents with children, heterosexual couples who are not married but have children, or gay couples who have children.

*Realita, Cinta dan Rock n'roll, and Lovely Man* represent a different relationship between parents and children. The main character in *Realita, Cinta dan Rock n'roll*, Nugi has abandoned his formal education, likes his freedom, and

dreamed in becoming a rock n'roll musician with his best friend, Ipang. He lived with his mother. When his mother was not able to control Nugu anymore, she decided to tell him where is his father

*Ibu Nugu: "Kayaknya saatnya kamu ketemu sama ayah kamu, mungkin kamu akan lebih baik."*

*Nugu's mother: "It's time for you to meet your father, may you will be better, i think!"*

She thought that it's time for him to meet his biological father, as she thought that wish Nugu would be better if he lived with his biological father during the holiday. Nugu expect his holiday would be fun with a best friend and a father, but he was shocked because it was different than he ever imagined. He assumed that family should consists a father, a mother, and childs but in fact, he should call his father, "mama".

Similar theme appears in *Lovely Man*. An opening scene in *Lovely Man*, shows a transgender who run ragged and had several cuts on his face, alternatie between scenes that show a young woman who was in the train. The first dialog giving the clue that Cahaya is on the train to Jakarta to meet her biological father and receiving phone call from her mother;

*"Denger dulu bu, Aya minta maaf ya bu... Aku baik-baik ajah kok. Aku kan kesini cuma pengen ketemu sama bapakku sendiri.. Besok juga sudah pulang kok naik kereta pertama.. Ya habis sampai sekarang Aya belum pernah ketemu sama bapakku sendiri. Aku kan juga pengen kenal sama bapak.. Ya ibu juga harus ngertiin Aya dong, ibu nggak bisa ngumpeti bapak terus-terusan dari Aya... Iya bu, iya.. Ya pokoknya, intinya aku cuma pengen ketemu sekali ajah kok sama bapak.. Ya kalau nanti misalkan bapak mengecewakan Aya, ya biar Aya sendiri lah yang tanggung resiko ya bu.."*

*"Listen to me mom, i apologize... I'm fine. I'm here just because i want to meet my father. Tomorrow i will be back home, by the train at the first schedule. It is because i never meet my father. I just want to know him. You must understand it, mom.. You can not hide him for along time from me. Yes mom... The point is i just want to meet him eventhough for once. If he make me disappointed, i will accept all the risk"*

Cahaya is a 19 years old young woman and just graduated high school. She never knew how the figure of her birth father, since she was 4 years old. She ventured to Jakarta because she wanted to meet her father. She said to her mother that she will accept whatever the risk if she disappointed with him.

According E.Y.Kim in his book *The Yin and Yang of American Culture* (2001), "The Family is the basic unit of society, and it is at the heart of its survival".[4] Family is the first foundation in which human learns about life for the first time. Family also plays a role in the formation of identity and culture an individual.

The nuclear family, also known as a two-generation family, ideally consisting of a father, mother, and child. Cultural values that exist within the nuclear family is reflected by parenting.[5] In Indonesia, in general, a mother's role is to take care of domestic chores such as cooking, caring for children, and doing other domestic chores. While, the role of

the father is as a leader and a decision maker in the family. Father is also expected to contribute in public. According to Sigmund Freud and John Bowlby, the mother is the central figure in a child's life [5]. She experiences pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and caring for the child. Furthermore, mother's are also more often to interact with the child. Freud stressed that the role of the father is emerging in the final stages of childhood [5].

Both of the films show mothers characters as single parents. Their husbands left because they chose to be a transgender or transsexual. Mr. Mariadi went to America when Nugu was childhood. Meanwhile, Saiful left Cahaya and her mother when she was 4 years old. When a child becomes a teenager and he had a big problems, the figures of father is needed.

### III. INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM IN THE FAMILY

Individualism and collectivism is closely related to the concept of family and their interactions between family members. Individualism and collectivism often considered to have conflicting meanings. Individualism assumes that the human individual is sovereign and independent [6]. Humans have independent thinking and freedom for self-actualization. Humans also have the right to determine their own happiness, but they are also a member of a social group that is responsible for the harmony of the group. When a man has become part of a social group, the collective culture also inherent in his self. Humans are part of a group since he was born, and the first group in which the human live is family.

Both of the films represent independent of family types. The relationship is important, but never more important than each person's individual identity [7].

Saiful "Ipuy" is a father who left his family 15 years ago. He felt guilty when his wife knew that he became a transgender in night and normal guy at day. Although Saiful acknowledged his love for his family, he choose his own life instead, so he left home but he managed to send money every month. He thought this has already enough despite he has never present for his family.

*Cahaya: Emangnya nggak ada kerjaan lain di Jakarta?*

*Saiful: Gua kerja betulan, duit yang gua dapat juga bukan duit boongan. Duit beneran, bukan duit monopoli, dan duit yang gua hasilin lebih besar daripada cuma nyuci atau sopir. Asal lu tau ya, duit yang gua dapat itu buat biaya lu sekolah.*

*Cahaya: Tapi sekarang aku nggak perlu biaya sekolah lagi pak*

*Saiful: Maksud lu apa? Jadi setelah lu tau bapakmu kerja gini, lu nggak mau uang lagi? Jangan lu pikir gua kerja gini karena terpaksa ya, gua senang kok. Jadi lu nggak usah mikir macem-macem. Gue bilang juga lu apa, lu persis kayak ibu lu.. nanya melulu!*

*Cahaya: Namanya juga anaknya.*

*Cahaya : Is there another job in Jakarta?*

*Saiful: I'm a hard worker, i get my money seriously. It is not money game. It's bigger than the driver salary. You must know that i pay your school fee.*

*Cahaya: But now, i dont need it again*

*Saiful: What do you mean? After you know what i did, you said that you dont need my money again, do you? Dont ever think i perforce. I'm happy. Like what i said before, you always ask like your mother.*

*Cahaya: Like mother, like daughter*

The dialogue shows that Cahaya worried about her father's life. When her father explain that he was working to pay her school fee, she said that she does not need anymore because she has graduated. But then, he said that he feel comfortable and happy being a transgender, although in doing so he ignoring his family's happiness, especially for Cahaya who never has a father figure in her life.

*Cahaya: Memang sejak kapan sih bapak kayak gini?*

*Saiful: Lu ngapain sih kesini tanya2 kayak gitu, lu itu mau interogasi gue ya?*

*Cahaya: Bapak bisa nggak sih ngomongnya nggak pakai gue atau lu? Aku ini kan anak bapak. Pak tunggu dulu dong pak, ya kan aku cuma nanya salahnya aku apa?*

*Saiful: Salah lu adalah lu ngajarin gue. Anak kecil ajarin orang tua, kurang ajar namanya*

*Cahaya: Ya kalau misalnya aku anak bapak, nggak sepantasnya dong orang tua itu ngomong gue atau lu sama anaknya. Pak, aku ini lagi hamil pak.. kasi' aku satu alasan kenapa aku nggak harus gugurin kandungan ini sedangkan bapak punya anak ajah ditinggalin? Ya wajar kalau aku nanya kayak gini pak...*

*Cahaya: When are you be like that?*

*Saiful: What are you doing in here and ask me like that? Do you interrogate me?*

*Cahaya: Dont say "gue" or "lu". I'm your daughter. Am i false? I just asking.*

*Saiful: Your false is you teach me.*

*Cahaya: If i'm your daughter, you should not. Pa.. i am pregnant, now. So give me the reason why i dont do abortion, while you left you daughter. It's natural, right?*

The conversation show us that Cahaya was so confused and guilty because she was pregnant and yet not eagerly to be married. In this conditions, she needs attention from a father to protect her, both physically and psychologically.

The different point of view is shown on *Realita, Cinta dan Rock n'roll*. When Nugi felt disappointed and angry with his father, his mother give advice.

*"Kamu tau aku sangat menyayangi ayah kamu. Dan seperti apapun keadaannya sekarang ini, nggak ngerubah sayang aku sama dia. Kamu tau kenapa? Karena itu sudah menjadi garis hidupnya dan aku rela karena itu bisa buat dia bahagia."*

*"You know that i love your father so much. And whatever his condition now, i'm still loving him. You know why? because it has become his choice of life, and i'm willing when it can make him happy."*

She said that she always love Mariadi, even though he is a transsexual. She believes it was the best choice in his life because he looks so happy, and she also happy for him.

#### IV. TRANSGENDER, TRANSSEXUAL, AND FAMILY

In Indonesia, transgender and transsexual is still considered a taboo subject. Some people think it is against nature given by God. Pros and cons in the society appeared. Some people are judging that it was contrary to religious norms and the norms of society. In general, a person who has a male gender will be dressed appropriately like a male supposed. Conversely, a person who has a female gender will be dressed appropriately like a female supposed. Transgender is a gender identity that is owned by an individual who feels different from his own sex. It can be identified by how the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of the individual. On the other hand, transgender who have already done surgery genitals so he have a different sex permanently, is called transsexual.

Kusuma in her conference paper "Television Plays An Active Role In Socializing A Transgender Presence in Indonesia" (2012), said that television as a mass media plays an active role in constructing and reconstructing how transgender presence in the Indonesia society.[8] Similar to television, film is a medium of mass communication which also have three main functions; as a medium of information, entertainment, and education. Mass media is powerful enough to socialize existence of transgenders in society, so they will have a certain position in society.

*Realita, Cinta, dan Rock n'roll*, and *Lovely Man* represent an interpersonal relationship a transgender and transsexual with his family. At beginning, Saiful and Mariadi are feeling guilty and confuse to tell the truth about their conditions. They chose a different way to resolve their own problems.

Mariadi which was once a taekwondo athlete, went to America and he chose to be a transsexual. He hide the identity from his son, but not with Nugi's mother. When he came back to Indonesia, he has not ready to meet his son until Nugi came to see him. It is not easy for Nugi to understand about his father, he was deeply ashamed and angry. There was also rejection that made Mariadi feeling sad.

One day, Mariadi helps a woman whose purse was stolen. He was against the thief and beat him. When some people praise his taekwondo act, Nugi was proud and spontaneously admitted that a transsexual in front of them is his "mama". Slowly, Nugi could enjoy the quality time with Mariadi. They did several activities together at home. They were practicing dance, shopping, and went to cinema together. A high cohesion and good adaptation could improve the interpersonal relationship between Mariadi and Nugi. Nugi tolerate Mariadi who is a transgender, he still respect him as a father. But it will so difficult to him when his parents divorce and have each lover.

To explain how a family relationship, the dimensions of cohesion and adaptability are indispensable. Both of these dimensions affect and are affected communication.[9] Cohesion can be understood as the level of closeness between family members, either physically or psychologically. While adaptation is related with the change. The human always changes, because influenced by other people, experiences, environment, or themselves. Although we are very close with our family, we need to adapt everytime. The important things in family are awareness, caring, trust, and good interpersonal communication.

The different story shows in *Lovely Man*, when Cahaya met Saiful only for several hours. She met his father at night, when his father worked as a transvestite. At the first time met him, she was surprised and also disappointed. In *Realita, Cinta, dan Rock n'roll*, Mariadi is open about his identity when Nugl met him. In contrast, there was a denial from Saiful when Cahaya met him. He drove away his daughter that came alone, after take her to dinner. Eventhough he knew if she did not have a place to stay overnight, he just give her some money and left her on along side the road.

A few moments later, Saiful realized if her daughter would be in danger if she is alone in the big city at the night. He was back looking for Cahaya and accompany her, until the next day. Their quality time was very briefly but they talked some very meaningful things about life, family and transgender.

Saiful told that it was very difficult to him to be a transgender because so many people insulting or or even look at him in disgust. It also happen when Cahaya was sitting beside him or walk with him. Some people looked wondering, why a girl who wears a hijab talk to a transgender. There's even a man who expressly asked why she wanted to walk with a transgender. Cahaya responded without the shame, she just said that a transgender is her father. She also took off her hijab because she knew that his father uncomfortable with it.

*Laki-laki di pinggir jalan : Neng, kok mau sih jalan sama banci?*

*Cahaya: Itu bapak aku kok.*

*Man in the street: Why are you willing to walk with a tranvestite?*

*Cahaya: He is my father.*

Her responses made her father felt better and more opened, why he chose to be a transgender. Saiful began to grow affection to daughter, eventhough the ending of story he made a agreement with her daughter not to looking for him again. He also advised her to have a better life than him.

## V. CONCLUSION

*Realita, Cinta, dan Rock n'Roll*, and *Lovely Man* represent a different portrayal of the ideal family. Both of these films construct a new concept of the family and challenging the traditional family ideals. Family is not just limited to the membership consisting of father, mother and children, but was limited in the existence of parents and children.

Speaking of which, family is always related to individualism and collectivism. It is very relative depending on the condition of their families. The most important thing is still about caring, trusting, and supporting each other for family harmony. Associated with transgender and transsexual, both films put the main character who must deal with psychological distress when they have to give recognition to his children about his condition. Family rejection would be more painful than society's.

Film as a mass media in Indonesia has provided space on transgender and transsexual to indicate their presence. Both

films have constructed the existence of transgender and transsexual phenomenon from the point of view of humanity. They are human beings who also demand for recognition.

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