



MANIFESTATION OF SOCIAL ANXIETY IN PUTU WIJAYA'S SHORT STORY, MALU

Elita Modesta Br. Sembiring^{1*}, Saiful Anwar Matondang², M. Manugeren³

Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

*Email Correspondence: elitamodesta@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the manifestation of social anxiety in Putu Wijaya's short story Malu through a literary psychological perspective. Social anxiety is understood as a socially constructed emotional condition shaped by fear of judgment, shame, and social expectations. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research analyzes the psychological states, behavioral responses, and narrative techniques presented in the text. The primary data source is the short story Malu, while secondary sources include scholarly works on psychological criticism, social anxiety, and Indonesian literature. The analysis reveals that social anxiety in Malu is manifested through internal psychological tension, including excessive self-awareness, fear of negative evaluation, and feelings of shame (Malu). These psychological conditions influence the protagonist's behavior, leading to avoidance, silence, and emotional restraint in social interactions. Additionally, Putu Wijaya employs narrative techniques such as internal monologue, repetition, and absurd situations to effectively represent the protagonist's emotional struggle and highlight the oppressive nature of social norms. The findings suggest that social anxiety in Malu functions as a mechanism of social control, reinforcing conformity and limiting individual agency. Rather than portraying anxiety as a purely personal disorder, the short story emphasizes its cultural and social dimensions within Indonesian society. This study contributes to literary theory and criticism by demonstrating how psychological analysis can deepen the understanding of emotional representation in Indonesian literary works. It also encourages further interdisciplinary research on the relationship between literature, psychology, and culture.

Keywords: social anxiety, shame (Malu), psychological criticism, Indonesian literature, Putu Wijaya.

INTRODUCTION

Literary works often function as reflections of social realities, capturing psychological conditions and cultural tensions experienced by individuals within a particular society. Through narrative, authors are able to articulate complex emotional states that may be difficult to express directly in everyday discourse. One such psychological condition is social anxiety, a phenomenon closely related to feelings of fear, shame, and self-consciousness arising from social interaction. In literature, social anxiety is frequently manifested through characters' internal conflicts, behaviors, and responses to societal expectations. As a result, literary texts provide a valuable medium for examining how social anxiety operates within specific cultural and social contexts. Social anxiety is commonly understood as a persistent fear of being judged, embarrassed, or negatively evaluated by others in social situations (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). While the concept originates in psychological discourse, its manifestations extend beyond clinical settings and are deeply embedded in social structures. Sociologists such as Goffman (1959) emphasize that individuals continuously perform roles in social life, and anxiety emerges when individuals fear failure in maintaining socially acceptable performances. Literature, therefore, becomes an important site for exploring how social anxiety is constructed and negotiated within society.

Indonesian literature, particularly modern and postmodern works, often addresses psychological tension and social pressure experienced by individuals in communal environments. One prominent Indonesian writer who consistently explores such themes is Putu Wijaya. Known for his unconventional narrative techniques and focus on absurdity, Putu Wijaya frequently highlights the psychological struggles of ordinary individuals confronting rigid social norms (Faruk, 2007). His works challenge readers to question social conformity, authority, and the emotional consequences of societal expectations. The short story *Malu* (translated as *Shame*) is one of Putu Wijaya's works that vividly portrays the experience of social anxiety. The concept of *Malu* in Indonesian culture goes beyond personal embarrassment; it is closely tied to social values, communal judgment, and moral responsibility (Geertz, 1973). In *Malu*, the protagonist's fear and discomfort stem not merely from personal insecurity but from the internalization of social norms that demand proper behavior and emotional restraint. This makes the short story a compelling text for analyzing social anxiety from a literary perspective.

Through its narrative, *Malu* illustrates how social anxiety manifests in both internal psychological tension and external social interaction. The protagonist's thoughts, actions, and emotional responses reveal a deep fear of social exposure and judgment. This aligns with Freud's (1923) notion that anxiety emerges from conflict between individual desires and societal demands. By portraying this conflict, Putu Wijaya demonstrates how social anxiety functions as a mechanism of social control, regulating individual behavior through fear and shame. From the perspective of literary theory and criticism, analyzing social anxiety in *Malu* requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines psychological and sociological theories. Literary criticism allows readers to examine how narrative structure, characterization, and symbolism contribute to the representation of anxiety. According to Wellek and Warren (1956), literature not only mirrors society but also interprets and critiques it. Thus, examining social anxiety in *Malu* provides insight into broader social conditions within Indonesian society.

This study aims to analyze the manifestation of social anxiety in Putu Wijaya's short story *Malu* by focusing on the protagonist's psychological experiences and social interactions. The research explores how feelings of fear, shame, and self-consciousness are depicted and how they relate to societal norms and expectations. By doing so, this study seeks to contribute to literary criticism by highlighting the relevance of psychological themes in Indonesian literary works. Ultimately, this research is significant because it demonstrates how literature can serve as a lens for understanding social anxiety as a cultural and social phenomenon rather than merely an individual psychological disorder. By analyzing *Malu*, this study underscores Putu Wijaya's role in articulating the silent anxieties embedded within everyday social life. The findings are expected to enrich discussions in literary theory, psychology, and Indonesian cultural studies by revealing the complex relationship between individual emotion and social structure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discussions on the relationship between literature and psychology have long emphasized the ability of literary texts to represent inner mental states. Psychological literary criticism focuses on how characters' emotions, fears, and unconscious motivations are portrayed through narrative elements. According to Tyson (2006), literary texts often function as symbolic spaces where psychological conflicts are dramatized, allowing readers to observe the complexities of human behavior. This approach provides a theoretical foundation for analyzing emotional conditions such as anxiety within fictional narratives.

Anxiety, as a psychological concept, has been examined by several theorists beyond clinical psychology. Horney (1945) argues that anxiety emerges from social and cultural pressures that force individuals to conform to idealized standards. This view is particularly relevant to literary analysis, as characters are often depicted struggling to meet societal expectations. In literature, anxiety is not only an internal experience but also a response to external social forces, making it an important theme for socio-psychological interpretation. Social anxiety, specifically, has been discussed as a fear rooted in interpersonal relationships and public evaluation. Leary and Kowalski (1995) explain that individuals with social anxiety are primarily concerned with how they are perceived by others, leading to avoidance, silence, or exaggerated self-awareness. In literary texts, these characteristics are often represented through narrative monologue, hesitation in dialogue, and symbolic actions. Such representations enable critics to identify social anxiety even when the term itself is not explicitly stated.

Studies in cultural psychology highlight that feelings of shame and anxiety are shaped by cultural values. Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that in collectivist societies, the self is defined largely through social relationships, increasing sensitivity to social judgment. This perspective is particularly useful in analyzing Indonesian literary works, where communal harmony and social approval play a significant role in shaping individual behavior. As a result, emotions such as shame and anxiety are frequently depicted as social rather than purely personal experiences. Several scholars have examined Indonesian literature as a medium for expressing psychological tension. Teeuw (1984) notes that modern Indonesian writers often portray characters who experience inner conflict due to rapid social change and moral pressure. These psychological struggles are not presented in isolation but are deeply connected to social environments. Such observations suggest that Indonesian short stories provide fertile ground for examining social anxiety as a recurring theme.

Research on Putu Wijaya's literary style emphasizes his focus on psychological disturbance and social absurdity. According to Bodden (2010), Putu Wijaya's works often depict ordinary individuals trapped in uncomfortable social situations, highlighting feelings of confusion, fear, and emotional pressure. His narratives frequently challenge rational explanations, forcing readers to confront the irrational dimensions of social life. These characteristics make his works particularly relevant for studies grounded in psychological and social criticism. Previous literary studies have also explored the concept of Malu (shame) as a central emotional force in Southeast Asian narratives. Mulder (1996) suggests that shame functions as a moral regulator within society, guiding behavior through fear of

social disapproval. In literature, this concept often manifests through characters who suppress their desires or emotions to avoid social sanctions. Such interpretations support the idea that Malu can be analyzed as a form of socially constructed anxiety.

Despite existing studies on anxiety, shame, and Indonesian literature, limited research has specifically focused on the manifestation of social anxiety in Putu Wijaya's short story Malu. Most previous analyses emphasize thematic absurdity or social criticism without closely examining psychological dimensions. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by applying socio-psychological literary criticism to analyze how social anxiety is narratively constructed in Malu, contributing to a deeper understanding of emotional representation in Indonesian literature.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach, as the primary objective is to interpret and analyze the manifestation of social anxiety within a literary text. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for literary studies because it allows for in-depth examination of meanings, symbols, and psychological conditions represented through narrative elements (Creswell, 2013). Rather than measuring numerical data, this approach focuses on understanding how social anxiety is constructed and communicated through language, characterization, and thematic development in Putu Wijaya's short story Malu.

The primary data source of this research is the short story Malu written by Putu Wijaya. The text is analyzed as a complete narrative unit, with particular attention given to the protagonist's thoughts, emotions, actions, and interactions with other characters. Secondary data sources include scholarly books, journal articles, and critical essays related to psychological criticism, social anxiety, and Indonesian literature. These sources provide theoretical support and contextual understanding necessary for interpreting the primary text (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The theoretical approach applied in this study is psychological literary criticism, specifically focusing on social anxiety as a socially constructed emotional condition. Psychological criticism enables the researcher to analyze characters as representations of human psychological experiences shaped by social contexts (Barry, 2009). This approach is appropriate for examining how fear of judgment, shame, and social pressure influence the behavior and inner life of the protagonist in Malu.

Data collection is conducted through close reading of the short story. The researcher repeatedly reads the text to identify passages, dialogues, and narrative descriptions that indicate symptoms of social anxiety, such as fear of social exposure, excessive self-awareness, avoidance, and emotional distress. These textual data are then categorized based on recurring patterns related to social interaction and psychological tension. Close reading allows for careful interpretation of implicit meanings embedded within the narrative (Bressler, 2011).

The data analysis technique used in this study is textual analysis. The selected textual evidence is analyzed by interpreting how language, narrative structure, and characterization reflect social anxiety. The analysis follows an interpretative process in which textual findings

are connected to relevant psychological and sociocultural theories. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis helps identify patterns of meaning within qualitative data, making it suitable for examining recurring expressions of anxiety in literary texts. To ensure the validity of the analysis, theoretical triangulation is applied. This involves interpreting the text using multiple perspectives from psychology and sociology to strengthen analytical credibility. By comparing textual interpretations with established theories of anxiety and social behavior, the researcher minimizes subjective bias and enhances interpretive reliability (Denzin, 2012). Supporting interpretations with direct textual quotations also contributes to analytical transparency.

The scope of this research is limited to the analysis of social anxiety as manifested in the protagonist of Malu. Other psychological conditions or broader political interpretations are not examined in detail unless they directly relate to social anxiety. This limitation allows the study to maintain analytical focus and depth, ensuring that the discussion remains relevant to the research objectives. In conclusion, this qualitative methodological framework enables a systematic and theory-driven analysis of social anxiety in Putu Wijaya's Malu. By combining close reading, psychological criticism, and textual analysis, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social anxiety is represented in Indonesian literary discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the qualitative textual analysis conducted on Putu Wijaya's short story Malu. The analysis reveals that social anxiety is manifested through recurring psychological states, behavioral responses, and narrative techniques experienced by the protagonist. These manifestations are identified through close reading and categorized into major thematic patterns. The results demonstrate that social anxiety in Malu is not merely an internal emotion but a socially constructed condition shaped by fear of judgment, shame, and social expectations.

Manifestation of Social Anxiety Through Psychological States

The first major finding indicates that social anxiety in Malu is manifested through the protagonist's internal psychological states. These states include excessive fear, persistent worry, and heightened self-consciousness during social encounters. The protagonist frequently experiences discomfort when being observed or evaluated by others, suggesting a deep internalization of social norms.

Table 1. Psychological Manifestations of Social Anxiety in Malu

No.	Psychological State	Textual Indication	Description
1	Fear of judgment	Anxiety when facing others	The protagonist fears negative evaluation
2	Excessive self-awareness	Overthinking actions and appearance	Constant awareness of being observed
3	Inner tension	Emotional discomfort and unease	Psychological pressure during social situations

No.	Psychological State	Textual Indication	Description
4	Shame	Feelings of embarrassment (Malu)	Emotional response rooted in social norms

Table 1 shows that fear and shame dominate the protagonist's psychological experience. These states indicate that social anxiety operates internally as a persistent emotional burden, reinforcing self-doubt and emotional restraint.

Manifestation of Social Anxiety Through Behavioral Responses

The second finding reveals that social anxiety is also manifested through observable behavioral responses. The protagonist tends to avoid confrontation, withdraw from social interaction, and suppress personal expression. Such behaviors indicate an attempt to prevent embarrassment or social disapproval.

Table 2. Behavioral Manifestations of Social Anxiety in Malu

No.	Behavioral Response	Narrative Evidence	Social Function
1	Avoidance	Avoiding direct interaction	Prevents social exposure
2	Silence	Limited verbal expression	Reduces risk of judgment
3	Compliance	Obedience to social expectations	Maintains social acceptance
4	Emotional restraint	Suppression of feelings	Avoids shame

Table 2 illustrates that social anxiety influences behavior by encouraging passivity and conformity. These behaviors function as coping mechanisms that allow the protagonist to survive within a socially demanding environment.

Narrative Techniques Representing Social Anxiety

Another important result is the role of narrative techniques in expressing social anxiety. Putu Wijaya employs internal monologue, repetition, and situational absurdity to depict psychological tension. These techniques allow readers to access the protagonist's inner fears while highlighting the irrational pressure imposed by social expectations.

Table 3. Narrative Techniques Used to Represent Social Anxiety

No.	Narrative Technique	Function in the Story
1	Internal monologue	Reveals inner fear and anxiety
2	Repetition	Emphasizes obsessive worry
3	Absurd situations	Reflects social pressure and confusion
4	Minimal dialogue	Highlights emotional suppression

Table 3 shows that narrative form plays a crucial role in conveying anxiety. The limited dialogue and emphasis on inner thought reinforce the isolating nature of social anxiety experienced by the protagonist.

Overall Pattern of Social Anxiety Manifestation

Based on the findings, social anxiety in Malu emerges as a multidimensional phenomenon involving psychological, behavioral, and narrative dimensions. These dimensions interact with one another, forming a cycle in which social pressure produces anxiety, anxiety shapes behavior, and behavior reinforces social conformity.

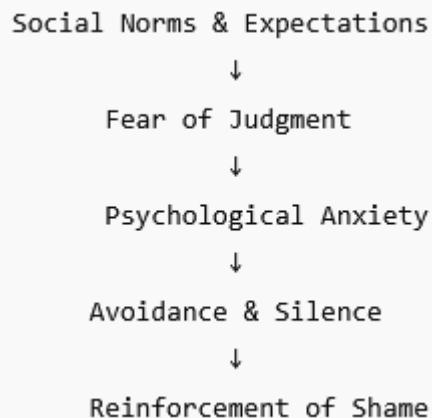


Figure 1. Model of Social Anxiety Manifestation in Malu

Figure 1 demonstrates that social anxiety operates cyclically. Social norms trigger fear of judgment, which leads to internal anxiety and behavioral withdrawal. This withdrawal reinforces feelings of shame, thereby sustaining the cycle of social anxiety.

This study aims to examine the manifestation of social anxiety in Putu Wijaya's short story Malu by analyzing psychological states, behavioral responses, and narrative techniques. The findings indicate that social anxiety in the story is a socially constructed emotional condition rooted in fear of judgment and shame. This confirms the notion that anxiety in literary texts often emerges from the tension between individual subjectivity and societal expectations rather than from personal pathology alone. The psychological manifestations identified in the results, such as excessive self-awareness, fear of negative evaluation, and persistent shame, suggest that the protagonist internalizes social norms deeply. These findings support socio-psychological perspectives that view anxiety as a response to social surveillance and evaluation. The recurring presence of Malu reflects how social anxiety functions as an internal regulator of behavior, compelling individuals to monitor their actions to maintain social acceptance. In this sense, the protagonist's anxiety is not irrational but culturally produced and socially reinforced.

The behavioral responses observed in Malu, including avoidance, silence, and emotional restraint, further illustrate how social anxiety influences social interaction. Rather than confronting or challenging social expectations, the protagonist adopts passive strategies to minimize the risk of embarrassment. This aligns with theoretical views that socially anxious individuals tend to avoid situations where their self-image may be threatened. In the context of the story, such behaviors demonstrate how social anxiety limits personal agency and reinforces conformity within the social structure. The narrative techniques employed by Putu Wijaya play a significant role in conveying social anxiety to the reader. The frequent

use of internal monologue allows access to the protagonist's anxious thoughts, making the psychological tension more explicit. Additionally, the use of absurd and uncomfortable social situations reflects the irrational nature of social pressure, where minor actions are perceived as potentially shameful. These stylistic choices intensify the reader's awareness of the protagonist's emotional struggle and highlight the pervasive nature of social anxiety.

The cyclical model of social anxiety identified in the results reveals how social norms perpetuate emotional distress. Social expectations generate fear of judgment, which leads to anxiety-driven behaviors such as withdrawal and silence. These behaviors, in turn, reinforce the sense of shame that sustains the cycle. This dynamic suggests that social anxiety in *Malu* functions as a mechanism of social control, ensuring compliance through emotional regulation rather than overt force. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that *Malu* operates as a culturally specific form of social anxiety. In the Indonesian context, shame is closely tied to communal values and moral accountability. The protagonist's fear is not merely personal embarrassment but a deeper anxiety about disrupting social harmony. This supports the view that emotions in literature must be understood within their cultural frameworks, as emotional experiences are shaped by collective values and social norms.

The discussion also highlights Putu Wijaya's critical stance toward social conformity. By portraying a character overwhelmed by social anxiety, Putu Wijaya implicitly critiques a society that prioritizes outward harmony over individual emotional well-being. The exaggerated anxiety experienced by the protagonist exposes the psychological cost of excessive social control, suggesting that social order is maintained at the expense of personal freedom. In conclusion, the discussion confirms that social anxiety in *Malu* is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing psychological, behavioral, and narrative dimensions. The story reveals how fear and shame are socially produced emotions that regulate individual behavior. Through this portrayal, Putu Wijaya not only represents social anxiety but also invites readers to reflect critically on the social structures that generate such emotional distress.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the manifestation of social anxiety in Putu Wijaya's short story *Malu* by focusing on the protagonist's psychological experiences, behavioral responses, and the narrative techniques employed in the text. The findings reveal that social anxiety is primarily expressed through fear of judgment, excessive self-awareness, and feelings of shame that emerge from the internalization of social norms. These manifestations demonstrate that social anxiety in *Malu* is not an isolated personal issue but a condition shaped by social expectations and cultural values. Furthermore, the study shows that social anxiety influences the protagonist's behavior by encouraging avoidance, silence, and emotional restraint as strategies to maintain social acceptance. Putu Wijaya's use of internal monologue and absurd situations effectively conveys the intensity of psychological tension while simultaneously critiquing the social environment that produces such anxiety. Through these narrative strategies, *Malu* exposes how social pressure can limit individual agency and emotional expression.

In conclusion, Malu illustrates how literature can serve as a powerful medium for exploring socially constructed emotions such as anxiety and shame. This study contributes to literary criticism by highlighting the relevance of psychological analysis in Indonesian literature and encourages further research on emotional representation in literary texts across different cultural contexts.

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