

**ADULT AUTISM UNDERGONE BY KEIKO AS THE MAIN
CHARACTER OF SAYAKA MURATA'S *CONVENIENCE STORE
WOMAN***

THESIS

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM
MALANG
2025**

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THESIS

Presented to

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of *Sarjana Sastra* (S.S.)

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2025**

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I state that the thesis entitled “**Adult Autism Undergone by Keiko as the Main Character of Sayaka Murata’s *Convenience Store Woman***” is my original work.

I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

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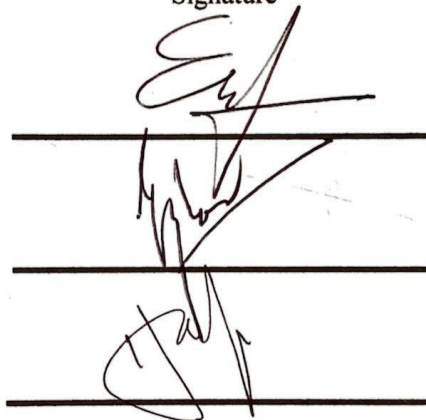
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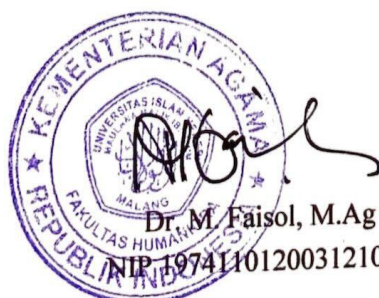
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MOTTO

“Man Jadda Wa Jadda”

Barang siapa yang bersungguh-sungguh, maka ia akan berhasil

DEDICATION

With gratitude, I dedicate this page to:

1. My parents, Mr. Hendra Andreansya and Mrs. Siti Mudmaida who always support me with all their love and never stop praying for me at every step. Without Mama's Papa's support and sacrifice, I would not have reached this point.
2. My uncle, Mr. Djohan Setiawan who always supports me with prayers and always facilitates my college needs so that I can study and complete my thesis smoothly without obstacles.
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7. To myself for persevering and being strong through it all. Despite several times feeling down and not confident, I finally managed to stand up again by always remembering that whatever I have tried and prayed for will give very happy results. The struggle will not be in vain, thank you for being able to fight and try until this point.

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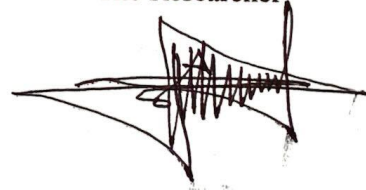
My deepest gratitude goes to my beloved parents, who always pray, encourage, and support me in every step. Thank you to my parents who have always been my place of return, giving encouragement and warm hugs on every journey of my life.

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May your kindness be rewarded by Allah SWT. Thank you for all your prayers and support. Hopefully this simple work can be useful for all of us. Finally, may this step be the beginning of a bigger and more meaningful journey. Thank you for being a part of this story.

Malang, 12 May 2025

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ABSTRACT

Dewi, Stivani Andreansyah Putri. 2025. Adult Autism Undergone By Keiko As the Main Character Of Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman*. Thesis, Department of English Literature. Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.

Advisor: Dr. Syamsudin, M.Hum

Keywords: *Adult autism, main character, neurodivergent*

This study discusses the representation of adult autism in the main character Keiko in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata. Keiko, a 36-year-old woman, exhibits various autistic symptoms typical of adults, such as difficulty in social interaction, dependence on routine, deep interest in one particular topic, and sensitivity to sensory stimuli. The purpose of this study is to identify the symptoms of adult autism experienced by Keiko and analyze her struggle in living as an autistic individual in a society that does not understand her condition. This research uses literary criticism method with literary psychology approach, and uses Hans Asperger's theory as the basis of analysis. The main data of this research is the 2019 translated version of the novel *Convenience Store Woman*, which is analyzed qualitatively based on narratives and dialogues that describe Keiko's character. The results show that Keiko experiences four main forms of struggle: surviving in a social environment that demands uniformity, facing changes that disrupt routines, facing social pressure and stigma, and undergoing inner conflicts that cause emotional isolation and identity crisis. This study concludes that Keiko's character represents a neurodivergent individual who chooses to stay true to who she is, despite going against social expectations. This research is expected to contribute to literary studies and increase public understanding of the condition of autism in adults.

ABSTRACT

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Advisor: Dr. Syamsudin, M.Hum

Keywords: *Autisme dewasa, tokoh utama, neurodivergen*

Penelitian ini membahas representasi autisme dewasa dalam tokoh utama Keiko dalam novel *Convenience Store Woman* karya Sayaka Murata. Keiko, seorang perempuan berusia 36 tahun, menunjukkan berbagai gejala autistik yang khas pada orang dewasa, seperti kesulitan dalam interaksi sosial, ketergantungan terhadap rutinitas, ketertarikan mendalam terhadap satu topik tertentu, serta sensitivitas terhadap rangsangan sensorik. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi gejala-gejala autisme dewasa yang dialami Keiko dan menganalisis perjuangannya dalam menjalani kehidupan sebagai individu autistik dalam masyarakat yang tidak memahami kondisinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kritik sastra dengan pendekatan psikologi sastra, serta menggunakan teori Hans Asperger sebagai dasar analisis. Data utama penelitian ini adalah novel *Convenience Store Woman* versi terjemahan tahun 2019 yang dianalisis secara kualitatif berdasarkan narasi dan dialog yang menggambarkan karakter Keiko. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Keiko mengalami empat bentuk utama perjuangan: bertahan dalam lingkungan sosial yang menuntut keseragaman, menghadapi perubahan yang mengganggu rutinitas, menghadapi tekanan sosial dan stigma, serta menjalani konflik batin yang menyebabkan isolasi emosional dan krisis identitas. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa karakter Keiko merepresentasikan individu neurodivergen yang memilih untuk tetap setia pada jati dirinya, meskipun bertentangan dengan ekspektasi sosial. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi terhadap kajian sastra dan meningkatkan pemahaman masyarakat terhadap kondisi autisme pada orang dewasa.

الملخص

"ديوي، ستيفاني أندريانسياه بوتري 2025. توحد البالغين الذي تعاني منه كيكو كشخصية رئيسية في رواية "امرأة متجر الراحة لساياكا مورانا. أطروحة، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية مالانج

المشرف: الأستاذ شمس الدين، الماجستير

الكلمات المفتاحية: التوحد لدى البالغين، الشخصية الرئيسية، نيوروديفرجنت

تتناول هذه الدراسة تمثيل التوحد لدى البالغين من خلال شخصية كيكو الرئيسية في رواية امرأة المتجر الشامل للكاتبة ساياكا مورانا. تُصوّر كيكو على أنها امرأة تبلغ من العمر ٣٦ عامًا، وتُظهر العديد من أعراض التوحد لدى البالغين، مثل صعوبة التفاعل الاجتماعي، والاعتماد الكبير على الروتين، والاهتمام المفرط بموضوع معين، والحساسية تجاه المحفزات الحسية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد أعراض التوحد التي تعاني منها كيكو وتحليل نضالها للتعايش مع هذه الحالة في مجتمع لا يفهم وضعها. استخدمت هذه الدراسة منهج النقد الأدبي مع مقارنة التحليل النفسي الأدبي، واعتمدت على نظرية هانس أسبرجر كأساس للتحليل وتمثلت البيانات الأساسية في الرواية المترجمة إلى اللغة الإندونيسية عام ٢٠١٩، وتم تحليلها نوعيًا من خلال السرد والحوار الذي يُظهر شخصية كيكو. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن كيكو تواجه أربعة أنواع من الصراعات: التكيف في بيئة اجتماعية لا تتقبل الاختلاف، صعوبة في التعامل مع التغيرات المفاجئة، الضغوط الاجتماعية والوصم، والانغلاق العاطفي نتيجة الصراع الداخلي مع الهوية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن شخصية كيكو تُعدّ مثالًا على الشخص العصبي المختلف (النيوروديفرجنت) الذي يختار أن يبقى وفيا لذاته رغم تعارض ذلك مع توقعات المجتمع. وتؤمل هذه الدراسة أن تسهم في إثراء الدراسات الأدبية وتعزيز فهم المجتمع لاضطراب التوحد لدى البالغين.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consist of the study, the problems of the study, the significance of the study ,scope and limitations, and the definitions of key terms. Additionally, it presents a detailed account of previous studies in the field.

A. Background of the Study

Asperger (1944) explains that individuals with autism exhibit typical patterns of behavior, such as difficulty understanding social norms, deep interest in specific topics, and a tendency to maintain routines. Although Asperger's studies initially focused on children, these characteristics are also seen to continue into adulthood and are known as adult autism. Adult individuals with autism often have difficulty navigating social life, the world of work and interpersonal relationships as they continue to carry different mindsets and responses from neurotypical individuals. Therefore, understanding how autism manifests in adults is important, especially when characters in literary works such as Keiko in *Convenience Store Woman* exhibit these symptoms consistently.

Adult autism is rarely written about in works of literature, even though it can be very specific to an individual. Autism Spectrum Disorder ASD as a developmental disorder is typically observed within the first three years of a child's life (Williams & Wright, 2007). Keiko Furukara the main character in Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman* is an adult woman whose traits suggest being on the autism spectrum. Through the portrayal of

Keiko's character, she tries to share how persons with this condition cope with society's expectations. Keiko's character in the novel is portrayed as someone who, although outwardly well-adjusted, still feels isolated from social norms that she deems irrelevant to her life.

This reading of the character is significant because it may lead to a broader conversation about how society understands autism. Through the eyes of Keiko, the author creates an in-depth picture of the internal difficulties individuals on the autism spectrum may experience when trying to adapt to social pressures of society. This study is significant for understanding both literature's representation of autism and how fictional narratives may serve as one means to expand social understanding of the condition. When it comes to modern literature, autism as a whole is little discussed when it comes to adults. Predictably, an analysis of Keiko's character from *Convenience Store Woman* would make literary studies forerunner.

In this research, several studies are needed that have examined the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata as well as studies on Hans Asperger's theory. These studies are used as a literature review to deepen the understanding of the narrative and plot of the story, as well as to understand how Asperger's theory can be applied in analyzing Keiko's character as the main character. By reviewing previous studies, it is hoped that the analysis of Keiko's character as a character who reflects the autism

spectrum can be examined more deeply, both in terms of character development and in the social context at hand.

First, research entitled “*Language Ability of Children with Asperger’s Syndrome*” by Napitulu (2023) that examined the case of children with Asperger Syndrome that has high closed language ability. This research investigates the cognitive and linguistic capacities of the child that indicates the unique characteristics of Asperger Syndrome as described by Hans Asperger. Hans Asperger hypothesis application will be the nuances of language ability and they have challenges for children with Asperger Syndrome for the understanding of their cognitive profile. The study gives a general understanding that can be used as a tool to help us analyze the cognitive profile of children who have been diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, from which action strategies can be identified that contributes to increasing children’s skills.

The study by Kurniawan & Samanik (2022) entitled “*Normal Standard of the Norm Ethic Within Japanese Society in Murata Sayaka’s Novel Convenience Store Woman*” analyzes the depiction of the normal standard of the norm ethic in Japanese society as depicted in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata. Using a sociological perspective, this study explores how social norms shape the individual, particularly the nature of Keiko as a protagonist. On top of that this study identifies multiple standards influencing what normal is within society, such as expectations to be a good daughter, be successful, and have a partner or

marital status. The article study portrays Keiko as someone who is abnormal: you are unreasonable if you choose to live single and work for part time in a convenience store for 18 years.

Another study titled “*Aesthetic Engagement and Soundscape: A Case of Convenience Store Woman, a Contemporary Japanese Novel*” by Chambers (2023) that examines the social and auditory aesthetics communicated via the protagonist, Keiko Furukawa. Keiko is a woman who has been a part-time worker at a convenience store for 18 years. The study also describes how the convenience store environment influences Keiko's experiences and how society is often quick to judge jobs within the profession unfavorably. Therefore, as a whole, Keiko's education demonstrates the significance of her labour in being a convenience store worker, she was able to experience normality and potentially fulfilment, despite society's expectations of marriage and family integration at the adult age.

Subsequently, research by Herlina & Hafizh (2022) “*Woman Stereotype in The Novel Convenience Store Woman by Sayaka Murata*” concerning female archetypes that have been affected by the patriarchal culture and the gender discrimination that exists in society. In this study, the types of feminine stereotypes are clarified and female characters in the novel are questioned as they can get rid of the stereotypes. In this analysis of Keiko, all the various ways in which negative stereotypes are attached her are explored, with negative stereotypes such as not being perceived as

competent in her field and failing as a woman in society. This study demonstrates how Keiko tries to break the stereotypes and lead her life on her own terms.

The subsequent research, titled *“Individuals Social Career as A Pursuit Of Selfhood in Sayaka’s Novel Convenience Store Woman”* by Pratama A. P (2022), delves into the theme of individual social careers and focusing on the character development of the protagonist. This thesis investigates Keiko as a representation of societal expectations and the pressures of conformity. Keiko’s role as a convenience store employee is depicted with as a personal choice and as a social label, emphasizing the intricacies of identity in contemporary Japan. The research findings aim to enhance understanding of personality development and social identity, prompting readers to contemplate their own experiences and societal pressures.

Another study, *“Positive Politeness Strategy and Social and Cultural Values in Convenience Store Woman”* by Pratama, Aryawibawa, & Sudipa (2022) explores the main character’s application of positive politeness strategies. This research aims to highlight the values, beliefs, and emotions reflected in the dialogues and thoughts surrounding the protagonist. According to the study, understanding politeness strategies can bridge cultural differences. It asserts that the uses of language and politeness is deeply tied to broader cultural and social identities within Japanese society.

Moreover, the research work “*The Image Of The Main Character In Sayaka Murata’s Novel Convenience Store Woman*” by Petrosyan (2023) examines Keiko life and fates after working in a convenience society for eighteen years. The paper explores what makes the protagonist’s perception of normality need underlying challenges and breaks with expected roles as she strives to conform. It also delves into Keiko’s backstory, including childhood trauma and her coping strategies such as mimicking others as a form of blending in. The article tackles the gender dynamic at play within the narrative, specifically the dynamic between Keiko and Shiraha.

Another work is “*Composition And Plot Construction in Sayaka Murata’s Novel Convenience Store Woman*” by Romanova (2023), which also discusses the conflict between prescribed patterns and personal choices through the protagonist’s struggle against prescribed norms. This study also reasserts how using characters in writing draws the readers attention emotionally. It discusses Murata’s approach to plot and structure particularly when it comes to exploring issues of individuality, societal conventions and emotional resonance. The study focuses on the complexities of Keiko’s life, and the wider implications of her choices within the society we live in today.

Furthermore, the study titled “*The Absence Presence Of Asexual Aesthetics In Sayaka Murata’s Convenience Store Woman*” by Shobita, M.N (2022) analyzes the representation of the asexual phenomenon that rarely appears in literature. In this article, Keiko is portrayed as a character

who is asexual or has no sexual attraction to others. It challenges the view of patriarchal society that tends to objectify female sexuality. Thus, this article aims to represent asexuality in the novel challenging traditional sexual norms, criticizing patriarchal views and providing a new perspective that can enrich feminism and gender studies.

The last is a study titled “*The Individuation Through Persona And Shadow On Sayaka Murata Convenience Store Woman*” by Galang (2021) analyzes Keiko's personality in the novel *Convenience Store Woman*. Keiko faced her shadow while still in elementary school, where her bad experience as a target of negative judgment made her an introvert. After going through several conflicts and experiences, Keiko finally found her true identity. Through this stage, Keiko managed to accept herself and express her identity freely to the society.

From the description of the previous research explanation, it is found that the novelty in this research lies in analyzing Keiko's character in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata through Hans Asperger's theory that highlights the autism spectrum in adults. In this study, Keiko is seen as a representation of a character with Asperger's characteristics, such as difficulty in understanding social norms and involvement in behaviors that are considered “strange” by society. This research is expected to make a new contribution by exploring how autism in adults is often invisible, as well as how society interacts with individuals like Keiko. This approach can enrich the study of autism in literature and

provide a new perspective in understanding peer relationships and social pressure.

While previous studies have examined the character of Keiko from various perspectives, such as societal norms, gender stereotypes, and her coping mechanisms in navigating societal expectations, this research focuses on an entirely different dimension Keiko's characterization as an adult with Asperger's Syndrome. Unlike Napitulu (2023), who analyzed the linguistic abilities of children with Asperger's Syndrome, this study applies Hans Asperger's theory to an adult character, addressing the often overlooked representation of adult autism in literature. Furthermore, this research highlights how Keiko's behavioral patterns and social struggles align with the characteristics of Asperger's, providing a detailed psychological profile rooted in literary analysis. By exploring Keiko's interactions with her environment and society, this study unveils the subtle yet significant challenges faced by individuals with autism in adulthood. Ultimately, this approach offers a new perspective in literary studies by emphasizing the intersections of psychology and societal norms, contributing to the broader discourse on diversity and inclusivity in literature.

B. The Problem of the Study

Based on the background explanation that has been conveyed above, several problems can be formulated that will be reviewed in this study:

1. What are the adult autism symptoms experienced by Keiko as the main character in Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman*?
2. How does Keiko struggle to coexist with her autism as a main character in Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman*?

C. The Significances of the Study

The topic of this study is important to research because there are limited representations of autism in literature, especially in adults, even though literature has an important role in shaping society's perception of the condition. The character of Keiko in *Convenience Store Woman* provides a rare perspective on the life of an individual on the autism spectrum trying to cope with social demands in a highly normative society. By delving deeper into Keiko's character, this study hopes to provide greater insight into how society views autism, and help challenge existing stereotypes. In addition, this research is expected to contribute to literary studies as well as social studies, especially in understanding the interaction between mental conditions and social expectations in culture and societal norms.

D. Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on character analysis of Keiko in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata. This study analyzes how Keiko through her behaviors, social interactions and emotional responses reflects the characteristics of autism in a social context. This study investigates the impact of societal normative pressure on Keiko's behavior as the protagonist in *Convenience Store Woman*. It employs theoretical

approaches focused on the representation of autism in literary works as the foundation for analysis. Rather than addressing clinical diagnoses, the study concentrates on the narrative portrayal of autism within the text. The analysis relies entirely on interpreting Keiko's character through traits and behaviors that align with the autism spectrum. Additionally, the scope of this research is restricted to literary interpretation and excludes empirical exploration of how readers perceive autism

E. The Definition of Key Terms

The following is a definition of the terms used in this study, which aims to provide a clear understanding of the main concepts:

1. **Adult Autism:** An autism spectrum disorder that can affect behavior and thought processes in adults.
2. **Asperger Syndrome:** Asperger syndrome is a neurodevelopmental disorder within the family of autism spectrum disorder (Hosseini & Molla, 2024). In this research, Hans Asperger's theory helps to understand how Keiko with all her habits tries to find her place in a society full of rules and expectation
3. **Characterization:** Characterization is the description of a character's attributes, behaviors and mental aspects in literary collectibles (Abrams, 1999). In this research, adult autism characterized in Keiko under Hans Asperger's theory.
4. **Social Norms:** Social norms are the unwritten rules and expectations that govern the behaviour of individuals within society (Durkheim,

2014). Social norms are important in this research in determining Keiko's struggles to conform and be herself at the same time

CHAPTER II

THE REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, researcher discuss the Psychology of Literature and Hans Asperger's theory used to analyze the object of research.

A. Psychology of Literature

Psychology of Literature is the study of human mind as it affects the human imagination. This field considers how psychological concepts can be applied to the analysis of literature, from exploring characters and themes to structures of narrative. As Wellek and Warren (1948) say, psychology and literature are very close, literature usually reflects human emotions, behaviors, and psychological conditions. This is understood as necessary to ensure perspective through which researchers are able to study how these conditions are represented in certain social and cultural terrain. This more robust analysis of character motivations and narrative structures is made possible by the application of psychological frameworks.

One of the most immediate practices you notice in way of reading is the importance of character analysis, which is about both the mental and emotional disposition of fictional persons in psychology of literature. Freud's psychoanalytic theory (1923) tends to imply that literary characters are frequently representative of the unconscious desires, defense mechanism, and internal conflicts. Likewise, Jung's concepts of archetypes (1959) suggests that characters are representing universal psychological patterns inherited from human collective unconscious. Such theoretical

frameworks allow literary scholars to discover deeper meaning within texts and provide insight into the ways in which psychological dynamics inform character growth. Thus, literature is a useful vehicle for discovering human psychology and behavior through such analyses as these.

In addition, the psychology of literature is a study that investigates the psychological implications of reading literature on the individuals. Readers' psychological profile and cognitive processes inform the way they read literary texts. According to Wellek and Warren (1948), there can be no literature that exist in a vacuum, it is always constructed by the filters of human precept and experience. This showcases the relationship between literature and psychology in how narratives shape the way human perceive and respond to emotionally. How someone reads a text is dependent on their own background, feelings, and current mental state. As a result, literature serves as a bridge between the personal and the cultural.

Psychology and literature are two complementary fields, sharing common sources of information (Ahmadi, 2015). Characters in literature can manifest life experiences through mental and psychological channels that psychology can use to draw from to validate their objects of study and clinical practices. Wellek and Warren (1948) in their study of the psychology of literature conclude that there are four main branches: the creative process of the author, psychological analysis of the author, study of the psychological principles within literary work, study of readers response to literature. Using the above classification gives us a methodology to analyze

and critique literature from the psychological view point. These areas, when explored drive researcher to a better insight of human cognition and interplay between cognition and arts.

In fact, literature has influenced psychology and vice versa. The Oedipus Complex and the Electra Complex is a concepts about the mind and emotions that arose in part from classical literature and mythology that put their stamp on psychoanalytical theory. These theories have found their way into modern psychology by explaining the role subconscious desires and patterns. The examination of psychology aided literature studied the traditional literary experiences as well as the corresponding psychological intellectual phenomenon. This advancement provides a more extensive exploration of the ways in which psychological aspects are integrated into literary narratives. Researcher explore how applying psychological theories to literary analysis can reveal new dimensions of meaning and character development.

Psychological analysis is the base foundation to further develop Keiko's character in *Convenience Store Woman* throughout this analysis. Using Hans Asperger's theory as an application, this research investigates an adult with autism psychological traits and how these traits impact Keiko's social response towards society. Keiko's actions and through processes reflect the challenges of someone on the autistic spectrum. The subtext of Keiko's characterization as a reflection of a psychological perspective allows for a deeper reading of the novel broader themes and contributes to

its role in the context of contemporary literature and depictions of autism. This analysis adds to larger conversations about inclusivity and diversity in literary studies by bringing lesser known psychological conditions.

B. Hans Asperger's Theory

To help better understand the nuanced presentation of autism among adults, Hans Asperger's theory provides a structural framework. Although adult autism covers a broad range of behaviors, Asperger Syndrome is specifically a profile of high intelligence associated with significant difficulties in social communication. Asperger noted from the very beginning that people with this condition have difficulties with social cue interpretation and social environment adaptation (Asperger, 1944). This hypothesis addresses the particular traits of Asperger Syndrome like a reduced flexibility in the way to approach life, erratically resistant practices and issues creating connections in the adult life, which clearly distinguish common adult autism from Asperger Syndrome. Hans Asperger's theory has been used in this study as a theoretical framework to analyze Keiko's portrayal in *Convenience Store Woman* in terms of whether and how these different characteristics play a role.

Hans Asperger's research showed that autism symptoms appear in childhood and can continue into adulthood (Asperger, 1944). Although the term "autistic psychopathy" was originally used to describe children who had difficulty with social interaction and exhibited unusual behavior, Although Hans Asperger did not explicitly classify autism based on age, this

study uses the developmental stages based on the developmental psychology approach to strengthen the clarity of the analysis context. According to Santrock (2012), human development is divided into several age stages, namely childhood which lasts from 0-12 years old, adolescence from 13-18 years old, and adulthood which starts from 18 years old and above. Thus, 36-year-old Keiko can be academically classified into the adult category. This explanation is important to support the focus of the research that discusses the symptoms and struggles of characters with adult autism based on Hans Asperger's theory, although Asperger himself does not classify these symptoms based on age specifically.

While adult autism is a collective term that comprises various forms of autism over the autism spectrum, Asperger Syndrome offers a specific profile that is characterized by well-developed language skills and average to superior intellectual capabilities, combined with severe impairments in social interactions (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). That distinction is important because, although Asperger Syndrome has been subsumed by the ASD in current diagnostic classifications, Hans Asperger's original clinical observations still provide useful insights into the behavioral and cognitive characteristics of people with high functioning autism. Adult autism is a broader category that encompasses a diversity of experiences, whereas Asperger Syndrome is more of a specific profile, characterized by intense, narrow focus and a profound tendency to stick to routine, which respectively condition an individual's interaction with the

environment. For example, *Supporting Change in Autism Services: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice* by (Ravet, 2015) highlights that these characteristics significantly impact people's social interactions in their day-to-day lives. The theoretical framework laid by the study draws a line between the more broadly defined autism found in adults in general and specific characteristics that are limited to the Asperger Syndrome population.

Despite being made decades ago, Hans Asperger's observations continue to influence the way that high function autism is conceptualized. While Asperger Syndrome is no longer considered a separate syndrome and is included now in the category of Autism Spectrum Disorder, many of his specific descriptions of social communication challenges, restricted interests, and repetitive behaviors have been confirmed in more recent diagnostic manuals, including the *DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The astute traits identified by Asperger is central to the condition and have been confirmed by historical studies and later research. This thread of continuity underscores his work's continuing relevance and applicability to modern conceptions of adult autism. This is why Asperger's theory serves as a solid theoretical underpinning to studying the characteristics of the Asperger Syndrome presentation from adult autism in general.

In the context of literary studies, the theoretical framework developed from Hans Asperger's work is especially useful because it

enables researchers to consider complex behavioral phenomena within a diagnostic structure. Asperger Syndrome traits are often thought of as the closest thing we can get to a diagnosis and distinguishing these from adult autism has proved to be key in the functional neurology framework, both for resolution of such cases, but also for their close classification with high functioning individuals. For instance, this is an important distinction to have to make to understand how characters like Keiko from Convenience Store Woman are navigating social expectations and internal conflicts in complex and nuanced ways. In addition, utilization of this theory is reassurance that the analysis is based on observations and studies that have laid the foundation for clinical and academic areas of practice. This solid theoretical groundwork frames the upcoming analytical chapters, but also engages in larger conversation around diversity and representation in literature.

To establish a theoretical foundation the landmark work of Hans Asperger offers a critical reference point in theory about adult autism. Although Asperger's original observations have been since encapsulated within modern diagnostic frameworks such as (Diagnostic And Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, "DSM-5", 2013), Asperger's insights are much needed in light of recent reclassifications of autistic presentations and as they pertain to high functioning individuals on the spectrum. In two parts, this section describes the theoretical constructs of

adult autism (especially Asperger Syndrome), namely the symptomatology and the struggles challenges arising from this condition.

1. Symptoms of Adult Autism

Hans Asperger's pioneering work and subsequent research have highlighted several distinct symptoms commonly found in individuals with Asperger Syndrome. These symptoms are particularly relevant in understanding the character of Keiko in *Convenience Store Woman*. Below are the primary symptoms based on Asperger's description and other contemporary sources:

a) Difficulties in Social Interaction

Individuals with Asperger Syndrome often exhibit challenges in understanding and adhering to social norms. This is attributed to a "lack of intuitive understanding" of non verbal cues, which can lead to perceived social awkwardness (Asperger, 1944).

b) Intense Interest to Specific Topic

A hallmark of Asperger Syndrome is an intense, narrowly focused interest in specific subjects or activities, commonly referred to as "special interests." This focus provides a sense of stability but may also limit flexibility in social contexts (Asperger, 1944).

c) Repetitive Behaviors and Routines

Autistic children exhibit behavior patterns that are very rigid, repetitive and often difficult to change. These routines serve as a way to maintain stability and minimize disruption from an environment that they perceive as unpredictable (Asperger, 1944).

d) Sensory Sensitivities

Hans Asperger also observed that some children with autism showed unusual reactions to their physical environment, including an exaggerated response to loud noises or unexpected disturbances, which is now interpreted as a form of sensory sensitivity (Asperger, 1944).

2. Struggles of Individual with Autism

Although Autism Spectrum Disorder encompasses a wide of experiences, individuals with Asperger Syndrome face distinct challenges in navigating environments that are often not designed to accommodate their unique cognitive and social processing styles. These challenges extend beyond core symptoms, involving complex interactions between internal emotional states and external societal pressures. These problems in adapting to social contexts and coping with unexpected changes and the emotional toll of continual misunderstanding can be theorized to relate cumulatively to the struggles experienced by persons with Asperger Syndrome. Add to that, many societal structures are build on a strong preference for

routine and a high value on conformity. This look at the challenges that are common for them, which it should be noted is in more broad strokes and not a nuanced character study:

a) Surviving in Social Environment

Cues of the social interaction turn out to be much more difficult to decode by individuals with Asperger Syndrome, which hinders the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships and often ends up in feelings an isolating experience (Asperger, 1944).

b) Struggling with Disruption and Change

Individuals with autism tend to be very attached to organized routines and rules (Asperger, 1944). Sudden changes or disruptions to their daily patterns can trigger anxiety, confusion and even extreme reactions.

c) Fighting Against Social Judgment and Stigma

Hans Asperger in his research also noted that many autistic children are considered "problematic" or "strange" by society because of their unusual behavior (Asperger, 1944). Individuals with autism who are often stereotyped and misunderstood will have more difficulty in socializing.

d) Enduring Emotional Isolation and Identity Crisis

Individuals with autism experience inner conflict as they often do not fit into societal norms (Asperger, 1944). They

have a different way of thinking and responding to the world,
which makes them constantly have to suppress who they are
in order to be socially accepted

This chapter has provided a theoretical framework that synthesizes knowledge from the psychology of literature and Hans Asperger's theory. The debate has made it clear that adult autism covers a wide range of manifestations, while Asperger Syndrome describes a specific pattern of being marked by particular symptoms, such as problems in social interaction, intense specific interests, strict adherence to routines and sensory hypersensitivity. These theoretical constructs not only provide a nuanced understanding of the cognitive and behavioral traits associated with Asperger Syndrome, but also delineate the unique challenges faced by individuals on the autism spectrum. By synthesizing these perspectives, the chapter lays a solid foundation for subsequent analysis, offering a lens through which the interplay between psychological traits and societal expectations can be examined. This framework sets the stage for deeper exploration of identity and social dynamics in later chapters.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses method that corresponds to the purpose of this research question that is to identified and understand the autistic symptom of the main character Keiko and her struggle to fit in the society in the *Convenience Store Woman* novel by Sayaka Murata. As a result, the research approach is thematic analysis which implements Hans Asperger theory. This research method structure explained about research design, data source, data collection and data analysis.

A. Research Design

This research employs the method of literary criticism as its research design. The option of literary criticism is selected as it allows an in depth analysis of the novel *Convenience Store Woman* through its text, themes and characters through theoretical frameworks. As Abrams (1999) states, literary criticism is the disciplined analysis and interpretation of literary works offering structure approaches to understanding meaning, form and authorial intent. This lens works especially well for exploring the character of the protagonist Keiko, with all her psychological facets and social interactions. Using Hans Asperger's theory this research will diagnose the character of Keiko about the symptoms of adult autism and her inability to communicate with her society or having her own emotional and normal life. This complex framework emerges out of the intertwining of a long history of literary criticism and Hans Asperger's theory of autism, which together

serve to elucidate the ways in which the novel navigates the varied spectrum of autism in adults.

B. Data Source

The study utilizes the novel *Convenience Store Woman* (2019) by Sayaka Murata as the primary data source. This novel, originally published in Japanese in 2016 under the title *Konbini Nigen*, was translated into English by Ginny Tapley Takemori and published by Grove Press, New York in 2019. The novel centers around Keiko Furukara a 36 years old woman who exhibits various symptoms aligned with adult autism as described in Hans Asperger's Theory discussed in this study. The narrative is rich with descriptions, dialogue, and internal monologue that illustrate Keiko's psychological state and her continuous struggles to engage with societal norms and expectations. These elements make the novel a compelling object of analysis. Additionally, supporting data from previous scholarly literature is used to enrich the interpretation and provide a theoretical foundation for the research. These sources help to contextualize and deepen the understanding of the adult autism issues portrayed in the novel.

C. Data Collection

In this study, the data collection was conducted by carefully reading the novel *Convenience Store Woman* and noting the important points. The process led to a deep examination of narration, dialogue, and descriptions pertaining to the manifestations of adult autism present in the protagonist, a

woman named Keiko Furukara. This research also put records for additional data found in such secondary literatures as scientific journals, articles and theory books referring to adult autism and Hans Asperger's theory. The collected data was then classified according to its relevance to the problem posed by the research and the objective of the analysis. This tactical methodology is anticipated to have the raw data strengthen the research results in greater detail and depth of analysis.

D. Data Analysis

This research employs a psychoanalytic reading of the novel, applying Hans Asperger's theory to Keiko Furukara's symptoms of adult autism. The study uses academic style literary criticism to analyze the novels narrative, dialogue and behaviors seen to better understand how the above contributes to the challenges present within adult autism. The research focuses on Keiko's social difficulties, her obsessive routines and her repetitive behavior by closely tracing her behavior and thought process. This is a structured way of seeing how Keiko processes a complicated social scenery. Ultimately, the results were intended to provide an insight into the interplay between Keiko's inner life and the forces pressing in on it.

CHAPTER IV

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the research discusses the results of the analysis that answer the research questions that formulated in the first chapter. This discussion is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the symptoms of adult autism experienced by the main character, Keiko. The second part explains how Keiko's struggle coexists with the autism she experiences in her life as the main character in the novel *Convenience Store Woman*.

A. Adult Autism Symptoms Experienced by Keiko

Before starting the analysis, the researcher will explain the background of the main character, Keiko, in the novel *Convenience Store Woman*. Keiko is the first daughter in her family, and she has one younger sister. Born and raised by an ordinary family residing in the suburbs, Keiko's upbringing was characterized by a conventional domestic environment. From a young age, she was often regarded as an "unusual child" by the people in her neighborhood. Her parents expressed concern over her responses to social situations that deviated from conventional norms, such as her ability to understand others' emotions or her reactions that did not align with social expectations. As a 36 years old adult woman, Keiko experiences ongoing difficulties in navigating social situations and understanding how she is expected to behave.

Keiko in *Convenience Store Woman* appears to have autism syndrome. Autism is a serious developmental disorder that can affect

individuals, impacting the way they interact with the environment and others (Syifa, Rahayu, & Marshanda, 2024). Clearly, autism symptoms are caused by a combination of neurological disorders that affect communication, social interaction, behavior, sensory processing, and emotional regulation. To further understand how autism manifests in Keiko's character, this section will be divided into several subtopics that reflect the main symptoms of adult autism based on Hans Asperger's theory.

a) Difficulties in Social Interaction

One of the core symptoms of adult autism as described by Hans Asperger is the difficulty in engaging in typical social interactions. Individuals with autism often struggle to comprehend social norms, emotional responses, and expected behaviors in communal settings. This difficulty is evident in Keiko's early experiences, especially in how she interprets and reacts to emotionally charged situations. In the following scene, Keiko witnesses the death of a bird during her childhood. Her reaction, which contrast sharply with that of the people around her, highlights her struggle to align with expected emotional responses.

"I couldn't understand why should we bury the bird instead of eating it." (p.6).

"Everyone was crying for the poor dead bird as they went around murdering flowers, plucking their stalks, exclaiming, 'What lovely flowers! Little Mr. Budgie will definitely be pleased.' They looked so bizarre I thought they must all be out of their minds." (p. 7).

This statement shows that Keiko did not respond to the situation of the bird's death with emotions typically expected in social contexts, such as sadness, empathy, or compassion. Instead, her response was pragmatic and emotionally detached as seen when she questioned why the bird should be buried rather than eaten. According to Hans Asperger's theory, this behavior is classified under difficulties in social interaction particularly the inability to understand and respond appropriately to emotional and social norms. Keiko's unemotional and literal response to the bird's death demonstrates a cognitive style common in individuals with autism, who often process events based on logic rather than social emotional context.

Uta Frith (2003) explains that individuals with autism may lack a fully developed theory of mind, meaning they struggle to infer what others are thinking or feeling. This supports why Keiko did not exhibit typical emotional responses or understand the symbolic value of mourning, instead suggesting eating the bird. Her interpretation of the classmates' emotional actions as "bizarre" aligns with Frith's view that individuals with autism may find typical social behaviors confusing or illogical due to this cognitive gap. This lack of emotional resonance further isolates Keiko from her peers as she cannot participate in shared social rituals such as grieving. As a result, she becomes

increasingly detached from collective emotional experiences, reinforcing her perception of herself as fundamentally different from others.

b) Intense Interest to Specific Topic

Another common symptom of autism in adults, according to the theoretical framework presented earlier is the presence of an intense and focused interest in a particular topic or activity. These interests often dominate the individual's thoughts and routines, providing a sense of stability and comfort in their life. In *Convenience Store Woman*, Keiko demonstrates this trait through her deep and obsessive connection with the convenience store environment. Her attention to the store's routines, sounds, and atmosphere goes beyond mere professionalism, it reveals a fixation that shapes her identity and way of functioning in the world. The following data quotation illustrate how her intense interest manifests in her everyday experiences:

"Sometimes I even find myself operating the checkout till in my dreams." (p. 13)

"When I can't sleep, I think about the transparent glass box that is still stirring with life even in the darkness of night. That pristine aquarium is still operating like clockwork. As I visualize the scene, the sounds of the store reverberate in my eardrums and lull me to sleep. When morning comes, once again I'm a convenience store worker, a cog in society. This is the only way I can be a normal person." (p.14).

The quote shows how deeply interested Keiko is in the world of convenience stores, to the extent that it carries over into her

dreams and becomes her only source of calm. She describes the store as a “transparent glass box” that continues to live even in the middle of the night, as if it were the emotional and mental center of gravity in her life. When unable to sleep, she imagines the sounds and systems in the store to calm his mind, indicating an obsessive focus on a single object or environment. Asperger (1944) explains that individuals with autism often show a very intense interest in one particular topic and make it the center of their life structure. In Keiko's case, the convenience store is not just a workplace, but a whole world that she fully understands and a place where she feels her existence has meaning.

Individuals with autism often exhibit a highly systematic mindset and a strong interest in activities that provide structure and order (Asperger, 1944). Such interests are not just hobbies, but cognitive needs to relieve anxiety and maintain mental stability. Furthermore, Keiko states that being a convenience store clerk is "the only way she can be a normal person," which emphasizes that the store is not just a favorite place, but a part of her identity. Her intense interest in the structure, systems and sounds of the store suggests that she has formed an extreme single-object-centered life, which is typical of intense interest in autistic individuals. Asperger's explanation is expanded upon by Frith (2003), who suggests that this focus on small details is also

how autistic individuals understand and control their environment. In other words, the intensity of Keiko's attention to the sounds and activities of the store indicates autistic tendencies based on the typical cognitive structures described by Asperger and Frith.

c) Repetitive Behaviors and Routines

One of the hallmarks of individuals with autism is the tendency to engage in repetitive behaviors and rigid routines in daily life. Hans Asperger explains that individuals with autism have a need to maintain structure and order in their activities, so changes in routine can cause stress or confusion (Asperger, 1944). They feel more comfortable and secure in a predictable and stable environment. In *Convenience Store Woman*, Keiko shows a very structured lifestyle, both in terms of her daily activities and the way she goes about her work. This shows that she has a tendency towards repetitive routines that are an important part of how she functions in society:

“My shift is from nine, but I come early to have breakfast before starting..... For breakfast I eat convenience store bread, for lunch I eat convenience store rice balls with something from the hot-food cabinet, and after work I’m often so tired I just buy something from the store and take it home for dinner..... After breakfast, I check the weather forecast and go over the store’s data.....” (p. 19)

“Whenever I wake up early, I make a point of getting off the train one station before my stop and walking the rest of the way to the store.” (p. 34)

In this quote, Keiko shows a very repetitive and consistent lifestyle. She starts her day with breakfast from the shop where she works, lunch and dinner come from the same place without any variation. Even her habit of arriving early and doing certain activities before starting her shift shows a strong attachment to routine. She also walks from the same station every time she comes to work as part of the movement pattern she maintains. This illustrates how routines are an important part of his life that provide a sense of security and control over the environment.

Hans Asperger explains that individuals with autism often exhibit a tendency towards rigid routines and constantly repeated patterns of activity in an attempt to maintain stability in their lives (Asperger, 1944). Small changes in daily routines can trigger anxiety or discomfort as they feel more comfortable within a fixed structure. In Keiko's context, routine is not just a habit but a system that makes her feel part of society. By performing the same activities every day, Keiko feels normal and functional. This suggests that routines become a compensatory tool to overcome her limitations in social interaction and environmental processing.

d) Sensory Sensitivities

In addition to difficulties in social interaction, interest in certain topics and repetitive behaviors, individuals with autism

also often experience sensory sensitivity. Hans Asperger in his research explained that some of the children he observed showed an exaggerated response to sensory stimuli such as sound, light or touch (Asperger, 1944). This sensitivity can take the form of discomfort to loud noises or extreme awareness to very quiet sounds. In *Convenience Store Woman*, Keiko demonstrates this symptom through her close relationship with the sounds in the store where she works. Here are some excerpts that illustrate how Keiko's sensory sensitivity emerges in her daily activities:

"It all blends into the convenience store sound that ceaselessly caresses my eardrums." (p. 1)

"I hear the faint rattle of a new plastic bottle rolling into place as a customer takes one out of the refrigerator, and look up instantly. A cold drink is often the last item customers take before coming to the checkout till, and my body responds automatically to the sound." (p. 1)

"As I arrange the display of newly delivered rice balls, my body picks up information from the multitude of sounds around the store." (p. 1)

The symptoms of sensory sensitivity in Keiko are evident in how she picks up and responds to sounds in the store. She not only hears the sounds, but also lets them "caresses her eardrums" indicating an over-sensitivity to sound stimuli. Hans Asperger noted that some children in his observations showed extreme responses to sounds or other environmental stimuli, and this became part of the typical autistic pattern (Asperger, 1944). Individuals with autism are often unable to filter sensory information in the same way as neurotypical individuals, so they

become distracted or over-focused on certain sounds. In Keiko's case, instead of being distracted she found comfort and even orientation through the sounds in the store which reinforced the role of the familial environment as a stabilizing support.

Furthermore, Keiko's automatic response to the sound of the falling bottle shows that she integrates sensory stimuli as an ingredient of her routine and her way of adapting to the social environment. This is in line with Frith's (2003) explanation that individuals with autism process the world in a very literal and sensory manner, and their reliance on information from the senses is very high. This sensitivity is not only a symptom, but also serves as a bridge for Keiko to navigate her daily life in a society that she considers unfamiliar. Asperger mentions that children with autism often only feel comfortable in environments they are familiar with, especially if they can regulate or predict incoming stimuli (Asperger, 1944). Keiko's attachment to the sounds in the store, then, is not simply a preference, but a form of self-regulation to create stability in a world that she does not fully understand socially and emotionally.

Based on the description of the four main symptoms that have been discussed, namely difficulties in social interaction, deep interest in certain topics, repetitive and routine behaviors, and sensory sensitivity, it can be concluded that Keiko exhibits a number of characteristics typical of

individuals with adult autism as described in Hans Asperger's theory. These symptoms appear consistently and are integrated into Keiko's daily life, both in her mindset, the way she responds to the environment, and in her social interactions. Hans Asperger states that individuals with autism not only have difficulty in conforming to social norms, but also tend to build rigid and limited life systems based on patterns that they consider safe and meaningful. This is evident in the way Keiko organizes her life around her work in the shop, where she finds structure, stability and identity. Therefore, an understanding of Keiko's autism symptoms is essential to see how she struggles with social life as an individual with autism, which will be discussed further in the next sub-chapter.

B. The Ways Keiko Struggles to Live with Autism

After recognizing the symptoms of autism in Keiko as the main character in *Convenience Store Woman*, it is important to look further into how Keiko goes about her daily life with the condition. Although she has found a safe space and a comforting routine at the convenience store, Keiko still faces challenges in her attempts to adjust to a social world that does not understand her condition. Social life and societal expectations are pressures that often make Keiko feel alienated and isolated. This shows that the struggles of individuals with autism are not only limited to internal aspects, but also include their interactions with their surroundings. Therefore, this subchapter will discuss the various forms of Keiko's struggles in living her

life as an individual with autism, which are divided into several important aspects.

a) Surviving in Social Environments

One of the biggest challenges that individuals with autism experience is adjusting to a social environment full of unwritten norms. In *Convenience Store Woman*, Keiko is portrayed as a person who often feels alienated because she cannot follow social expectations like everyone else. Society forces individuals to act according to certain standards, which for autistic individuals like Keiko, can be confusing and exhausting. Her inability to understand and respond to conventional social situations makes her a target for judgment and even rejection. This reflects how difficult it is for individuals with autism to adapt to a social system that leaves no room for difference.

“When something was strange, everyone thought they had the right to come stomping in all over your life to figure out why. I found that arrogant and infuriating, not to mention a pain in the neck.” (p. 48)

“The normal world has no room for exceptions and always quietly eliminates foreign objects. Anyone who is lacking is disposed of.” (p. 69)

In the quote *“When something was strange, everyone thought they had the right to come stomping in all over your life to figure out why,”* Keiko described feeling uncomfortable when people interfered with her life just because she looked “different.” Hans Asperger also stated that children (as well as

adults) with autism often experience social pressure due to their non-conformity with conventional social behavior, which makes them targets of control or correction from their surroundings (Asperger, 1944). Asperger (1944) reinforces this by explaining that the difficulty in interpreting the social intentions of others makes people with autism appear “strange” in the social world. This creates a conflict between their need for routine and order and society's demand for flexibility and social relations. As a result, Keiko chooses to withdraw and maintain a way of life that she finds most acceptable without having to sacrifice her emotional stability.

Furthermore, Keiko has difficulty adjusting to a social environment that demands uniformity and adherence to prevailing norms. In the quote *“The normal world has no room for exceptions and always quietly eliminates foreign objects. Anyone who is lacking is disposed of,”* Keiko realizes that society does not make room for individuals who are considered different. This sentence shows that Keiko feels herself as a “foreign object” that can be removed at any time because she does not conform to social expectations. Hans Asperger explained that individuals with autism tend to be unable to adjust to an inflexible social environment due to limitations in understanding implicit social norms (Asperger, 1944). This

inability often leads to social isolation as their behavior is perceived as inappropriate or deviating from common customs.

b) Struggling with Disruption and Change

One of the main challenges faced by individuals with autism is the difficulty in dealing with changes that are unexpected or outside of established routines. Hans Asperger emphasized that individuals with autism tend to rely heavily on structure and order in their lives, so sudden changes can lead to confusion, anxiety, or even disorientation (Asperger, 1944). Keiko as the main character in the novel *Convenience Store Woman*, shows a form of dependence on routine that is inherent in her life as a convenience store worker. When there is a change in the system or pattern of life that she has lived for years, Keiko feels lost and has difficulty adjusting. This illustrates how autism spectrum disorder affects an individual's ability to deal with change flexibly.

"I had judged everything on the basis of whether it was the sensible thing to do for the convenience store, but now I'd lost that standard. There was nothing to guide me over whether an action was rational or not. Before I became a store worker, I must have been following some kind of logic in my judgments, but I'd forgotten whatever guiding principles I'd followed back then." (p. 130)

Keiko had great difficulty in dealing with the changes that disrupted the structure of her life. In the quote, Keiko admits that after no longer working at the convenience store, she felt that she lost the standard to judge whether an action was rational or not

“There was nothing to guide me over whether an action was rational or not.” This shows that Keiko's entire way of thinking and acting has been shaped by the routine of the convenience store, and without it, she has no other system of reference. According to Hans Asperger, individuals with autism often have strong attachments to certain routines and become disoriented when these routines are disrupted (Asperger, 1944). Keiko's dependence on the structure of convenience store work illustrates how routines become the main support system in the lives of individuals with autism.

Furthermore, Keiko's inability to adjust to new situations reflects the cognitive rigidity often found in individuals with autism. She feels as if she has no principles or guidelines in life anymore after not being a convenience store worker, whereas for others, a career change might not cause such a deep identity crisis. Hans Asperger explained that children and adults with autism usually show limitations in flexibility of thought and tend to show extreme responses to environmental changes (Asperger, 1944). Keiko's reaction to this change not only illustrates her difficulty in adapting, but also shows how her identity is completely tied to the routines she has internalized. Thus, Keiko's response to change reinforces the picture of difficulty in

dealing with unexpected changes that characterizes autism in adults.

c) Fighting Against Social Judgment and Stigma

One of the biggest challenges faced by individuals with autism as adults is how they are understood and treated by the society around them. Society often has certain expectations of what is considered "normal" behavior and social life, such as having a romantic relationship or an established career. Unfortunately, individuals with different needs and mindsets such as Keiko's are considered strange or unnatural when they do not follow these social standards. Such views create strong social pressures and force Keiko to adapt to things she doesn't understand or want, just to be accepted by her social circle. The following data will show how society's stereotypes and misconceptions of Keiko as an adult woman living outside of social norms influence her actions:

"His insistence made me dubious, even though I'd been the one to propose it. Then again, when I recalled my sister's reaction and the expression on the faces of Miho and the others when I told them I'd never been in love, I thought maybe it really wouldn't hurt to give it a go." (p. 93)

The quote shows that Keiko feels compelled to be in a romantic relationship not because of her personal drive, but because of the pressure and judgment of those around her. Keiko realizes that having no experience of love is considered unnatural for a woman her age, and it makes people treat her

differently. The reaction of her surroundings made Keiko feel she needed to “pretend to be normal” to avoid negative judgment. Hans Asperger states that children and in this context adults with autism are often perceived as “normal” by society because of their inability to follow common social norms (Asperger, 1944). This suggests that society's rigid perception of what is considered "normal" can create social pressure that forces individuals with autism to conform to things that are actually against their own character and comfort.

Social stereotypes also make Keiko feel that she is a form of deviation from the societal system. When someone is considered “abnormal” for not living according to the expectations of the majority, then society tends to intervene and even impose solutions. This is consistent with Hans Asperger's explanation, which states that individuals with autism have different ways of thinking and feeling, but society is often not ready to accept these differences, thus creating social pressure to “correct” them to conform to existing norms (Asperger, 1944). In Keiko's case, the stereotype that adult women are supposed to have partners forced her to make decisions that she did not fully understand. This proves that societal misconceptions not only produce psychological distress, but can also push autistic individuals to

live in scenarios that they themselves do not understand and do not need, just to fulfill misleading social expectations.

d) Enduring Emotional Isolation and Identity Crisis

Individuals with autism not only face challenges from the external environment, but also experience deep inner conflicts regarding self-identity and social expectations. The inability to fully conform to societal demands often leads to psychological burden and emotional strain. Hans Asperger in his observations explained that autistic individuals have a complex inner world and tend to harbor emotional distress when they feel unable to be part of society as a whole (Asperger, 1944). In the novel *Convenience Store Woman*, Keiko experiences conflict between the role expected by the people around her and who she really is. The following data shows how Keiko grapples with internal pressure and the search for self-meaning amidst social demands that do not match her condition:

“No. It’s not a matter of whether they permit it or not. It’s what I am. For the human me, it probably is convenient to have you around, Shiraha, to keep my family and friends off my back. But the animal me, the convenience store worker, has absolutely no use for you whatsoever.” (p. 140)

“I caught sight of myself reflected in the window of the convenience store I’d just come out of. My hands, my feet they existed only for the store! For the first time, I could think of the me in the window as a being with meaning.” (p. 141)

In the first quote, Keiko reveals a sharp psychological conflict between herself as a human being who must follow social norms and her authentic self as a store clerk. She realizes

that her relationship with Shiraha is just a strategy to avoid social pressure from her family, not her own desires. This statement shows how Keiko is forced to create a “social version” of herself in order to mitigate external judgment. This illustrates the immense emotional burden that autistic individuals experience when having to align themselves with roles that do not fit their personal character and comfort level. Hans Asperger noted that individuals with autism tend to have strong and specific identities to their interests or routines, and when having to conform to social norms that go against these traits, they can experience significant psychological distress (Asperger, 1944). Keiko, who has found comfort and identity in her work in the shop, feels that anything outside of that role is a disruption to her existence.

The second quote reinforces the idea that Keiko finds the meaning of life and her true identity in her role as a shop worker. Her physical existence is only considered meaningful when she performs functions that fit into her organized and familiar world. This is a deep reflection of the psychological distress she feels when she has to step outside her comfort zone. The lack of meaning in “normal” social roles left her feeling empty and alienated, a condition commonly experienced by individuals on the autism spectrum when they are forced to live a life that does

not align with their cognitive and emotional needs. As such, Keiko experienced intense emotional and psychological burdens due to the pressure to fulfill social expectations. She feels that she can only be her full and meaningful self in a structured environment such as a shop, not in a conventional social life full of uncertainty and judgment. This perspective is in line with the thinking of Hans Asperger who emphasized that understanding the inner world of autistic individuals is key to recognizing the complexity of the challenges they face.

The four aspects discussed in this sub-chapter show that Keiko, as an individual with autism symptoms, faces significant challenges in living her life. From the difficulty in adapting to the social environment, the inability to cope with unexpected changes, the emotional and psychological pressure that continues to weigh on her, to the misunderstandings and stereotypes thrown by the surrounding community all provide a complex picture of the life struggles of autistic individuals in a rigid and homogeneous social system. Although Keiko never explicitly diagnoses herself, her behavior and emotional responses strongly reflect the characteristics Hans Asperger described of individuals with autism.

Based on the analysis in this chapter, it can be concluded that Keiko as the main character in *Convenience Store Woman* shows several symptoms of autism in adults, such as difficulty in social interaction, repetitive routines, intense interest in certain things, and sensory sensitivity. These symptoms are in line with Hans

Asperger's theoretical framework of autism in adults. In addition, Keiko also experiences various forms of struggles in her life, such as difficulty adapting to social environments, difficulty dealing with unexpected changes, emotional and psychological burdens, as well as misunderstandings and stereotypes from society. These struggles reflect how much autism has impacted Keiko's life, as well as the lack of acceptance and understanding from her surroundings. All of these findings reinforce the view that Keiko's character is a realistic representation of an adult with autism who sharply criticizes the societal pressure to conform.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This chapter presents conclusions from the analysis results that have been presented in Chapter IV and provides suggestions related to this research. The conclusions outlined aim to answer the formulation of the problems that have been formulated, while the suggestions are intended as input for future researchers who want to examine similar topics or who are interested in further studying autism in literary works.

A. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis in Chapter IV, it can be concluded that the character Keiko in the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata shows symptoms of adult autism that are in accordance with the characteristics in Hans Asperger's theory. These symptoms include difficulty in understanding social norms and emotional expressions, a tendency to imitate the behavior of others to fit in socially, a dependence on stable routines and structures, and a very intense interest in one specific area, namely convenience stores. These symptoms mark Keiko as having autism spectrum disorder in a form that is not explicitly diagnosed, but is very evident in her life narrative. Keiko represents an adult autistic individual trying to navigate life in the midst of rigid and oppressive social expectations. Therefore, this analysis shows that Keiko's character can be read as a form of representation of neurodivergence in contemporary literature.

Keiko's struggle to coexist with autism is reflected through four main forms of challenges that she faces throughout the story. Firstly, she struggles to survive in a rigid social environment that does not accept differences, making her feel alienated and often judged. Secondly, Keiko struggles to cope with life changes and transitions, as the structure of her routine and identity relies heavily on a regular pattern of work, especially in a convenience store. Third, she experiences social pressure in the form of judgment and stigma, especially in relation to her single status and lifestyle that does not meet society's expectations, forcing her to act against her will in order to appear "normal". Finally, Keiko experiences emotional isolation and psychological burden, as she is constantly in conflict between meeting social demands and maintaining her authentic self. These four forms of struggle show that Keiko's struggle is not just about being socially accepted, but about how she survives emotionally and psychologically as an autistic individual in a world that demands uniformity.

B. SUGGESTION

Based on the results of the analysis in this study, the author provides several suggestions related to the findings about Keiko's character as a representation of autistic individuals. First, for general readers, it is recommended to read *Convenience Store Woman* with a more open perspective on the issue of autism in adults. This novel is not just a story about everyday life, but also presents the psychological experiences of individuals who live outside social standards. Readers are expected to better

understand that not everyone has the same way of life, and that differences are not weaknesses, but part of human diversity. Thus, empathy towards autistic individuals can be built through reading experience and personal reflection.

Secondly, for future researchers, this study can be used as a basis for developing further research that is more in-depth. Research on the representation of autism in literature is still wide open and relevant to be explored from various theoretical perspectives, such as psychoanalysis, postmodernism, or gender studies. In addition, comparative research between autistic characters in literature from different cultures is also very interesting to study. Researchers could also consider exploring how these representations impact on society's perception of mental disabilities. Hopefully, this kind of research will not only enrich literary studies but also contribute to a more inclusive social awareness.

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