

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

*Transamerica* by Duncan Tuckers portrays struggle and complicated process of a man to undertake sex change operation. Bree, the main character, is a man who is in progress to change his birth gender through sex-reassignment surgery and consumes some hormone. In her way to get her sex-reassignment surgery, she finds that she has a son when she was a man and her son appears in her life now. Her therapist said that she has to finish her past which means that she has to meet her son and guarantee his life. This story is the picture of reality where a transsexual woman chooses her life and negotiates some problem as the impact of her decision to change her birth gender into the opposite one, from penis into vagina.

Based on article entitled *Duncan Tuckers Biography*, Duncan Tucker was born in Kansas City. When he was in school and in college, he has few ambitions and a little direction until someday he met a woman who becomes his close friend. She gave him some spirit and he got some different jobs. One day, this woman told him that she was a transsexual woman. She told him all of the process and it gave him inspiration to make what people know now as *Transamerica*. Some other of his works are *The Mountain King* that tells about the gay-theme anthology and *Boys to Men* that has made in 2002. According to article entitled *Award for Transamerica*, from *Transamerica*, he won some nominations such as

nominations for Best First Screenplay and Best First Film at the 2005 Independent Spirit Awards, nominations of Best American Indie and Best Screenplay in FT. Lauderdale International Film Festival, etc. Felicity Huffman as the main character in this movie also got many awards for her acting in this movie such as Best Performance in Academy Award, Best Actress in Bangkok Film Festival, etc.

The writer chooses this text because Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica* gives a brief picture of what happen on the transsexual people in 1970s. *Transamerica* is the representation of how transsexual people struggle their own body that make them uncomfortable and find their right body which means they have to change their gender to be in the opposite one. It is also the picture of how heteronormativity work around them. More specific, *Transamerica* is telling about the life of transsexual woman in America in 1970s which most people know that America is the liberal country. But then, although America is known as the liberal country, at that time, heteronormativity still exists there. Then the writer wants to see how heteronormativity works in that liberal country.

The writer chooses Duncan Tucker as the author because he is the director that tries to raise the transsexual issues although he is not the part of it. He is the author who wants to tell the audiences across his film that to be a transsexual is not something weird and abnormal. Before making *Transamerica*, he has made *Boys to Men*, a film which tells about the life of gay and his struggle. Unfortunately, this film is not as success as *Transamerica*.

The writer chooses this issue because the writer sees that most people think that to be a transsexual is something abnormal, weird, and strange. The writer chooses it in order to make people know that being a queer such as transsexual people, bisexual, gay and lesbian which means being the other excluded from heterosexual is not the weird or strange things such what most people thought. Most people said that being the queer is the abnormal one. Corber and Valochi (2-3) called it as the heteronormativity where the heterosexual people think that being heterosexual is the “normal” one and queer as the “other”. Next, it will arise the condition of the queer people who have been expelled from their society. Based on the article entitled *Transphobia and Discrimination*, the condition where the queer people are expelled from their society is often used to describe personal forms of heteronormativity, including rejection and verbal and physical abuse. Some find the roots of the term (the irrational fear of same-sex oriented people or feelings) useful in addressing heteronormativity attitudes. However, others prefer to use the more inclusive term, heteronormativity, to describe all forms of discrimination against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. The writer tries to do research of the heteronormativity in this film to tell to the other that transsexual is not a disease that needs to be cured but it is the way people to choose their life. According to Gail Mason, the heterosexual still stay as the principal in the most society.

While the very normativity of the institution of heterosexuality inevitably constrains the sexual subjectivities of those who choose it as a lifestyle, the negative implications of openly identifying as

heterosexual remain minimal. In contrast, visibility can operate to 'trap' the many women and men whose sexual desires and practices deviate from this benchmark ... not only because it restricts their sense of sexual subjectivity, but also because it brings with it the threat of social or legal sanctions, including discrimination, incarceration, violence or personal rejection. (81)

The writer also wants to see how people around Bree (the main character), in this case is her family, receive her as the transsexual and compare this issue to the reality. It is also to see how Bree negotiates the heteronormativity that happen to herself.

Heteronormativity has existed in our society for a long time. Most of the people thought that heterosexual are normal. Those who are excluding from hetero society are being in queer group that usually get some unkind attitude from their neighborhood. American physiological association policy statement said that transgender and gender variant people experience a disproportionate rate of homelessness, unemployment and job discrimination, disproportionately report income below the poverty line and experience other financial disadvantages. Transsexual people are the person who born normal but in their continuity, they feel living in the wrong body. When they change their gender it does not mean that they change into the other person. According to Mark Rees:

For the transsexual, a change of role does not mean a change of personality, although that seems to be a popular notion. One relative suggested to me that I should take up pipe-smoking! I

replied that I had no need of a nipplesubstitute! The treatment may have changed the body and hence the world's perception of one, but the person is the same. It seems absurd to undergo all that a role-change involves in order to become a male (or female) stereotype. That would be as much of a prison as being trapped in the wrong body. Treatment has rendered my body as congruent as possible with my gender identity—my sense of myself as male.

(35)

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

In analyzing how heteronormativity works around the main character, Bree, in Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica*, the writer will propose the following problems:

1. How is the transition process of Bree as the transsexual woman?
2. How does Bree negotiate heteronormativity in her family?

## 1.3 Objective to the Study

Based on the statement of the study above, this study intend to:

1. To give analysis of the transition process that happened to the main character, Bree, as the transsexual woman.
2. To give further analysis of how the main character, Bree, negotiates heteronormativity in her family.

#### 1.4 Significance of the Study

Transsexual is not a new issue in our society. But, mostly, most people still assumes that being a transsexual is something weird and abnormal. Then, it makes what people call as the heteronormativity where hetero society as the main population, are the normal ones, while people who are excluded from heterosociety are the abnormal people.

This study is written to see how heteronormativity causes the social unfair and discrimination between heterosexual people and transsexual people in the society that represented in the main character, Bree, in Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica* especially from the family that usually become the most powerful rejection of the transsexual people.

The result of this analysis is to give the awareness to the people especially students of the plurality in gender as one of the basic rights of humanity and to tell that being the people outside hetero society is not something abnormal but it is because of the merely different sexual orientation.

#### 1.5 Scope and Limitation

In order to get an effective comprehension analysis, scope and limitation will be clear. The first thing to be concerned about is the object of the analysis. Here the referred work is a film *Transamerica*.

To analyze this literary work, the writer focuses on the heteronormativity that happens around the main character as a transsexual

woman. This heteronormativity will be focused on Bree's family. How Bree negotiates the rejection of her family especially her mother who does not agree with her plan to do sex-reassignment surgery.

In *Transamerica*, there is another queer issue. Bree's son, Toby, is a homosexual. But it will not be discussed in this study. The writer will limit her analysis on heteronormativity only.

### **1.6 Theoretical Background**

This analysis will work on how heteronormativity appears around the main character, Bree, as a transsexual woman. This analysis also concerns about how Bree negotiates the condition of her neighborhood, especially her family, in the way they receive her as a transsexual woman. It is concerned of how Bree negotiates heteronormativity in her society such as her friends, her neighbor, and especially her family and her son. The writer will analyze this film by using narrative and non narrative elements, because it is also important to see the problem from non narrative aspect. Non narrative aspects that will be used in this text are the camera shot, the color and the music.

To support this analysis, Queer theory will be used to analyze the character of Bree as a transsexual woman and also to analyze how people around her, especially her family, accept her as the transsexual woman, and in general, how the heteronormativity works in Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica*. Does it the same as the reality where transsexual people get

the hardest way to tell people around them that they should not be in their body. Transsexual people feel that they should change it. They should change into the other sex. It is the hardest way to *coming out* as the transsexual people.

### **1.7 Method of the Study**

The object of this study is the heteronormativity that appears in *Transamerica*. In order to get these analysis become deeper, the writer chooses the library research to support the study. The library research means a process to find information in the library that can support the data of the writer such as how the heteronormativity appears in this film and how the real condition in the society so the writer can get more evidence of her work. Thus, to fulfill the information needs, the writer also search and collects the information from books, encyclopedias, journal, article, and other printed material that connected to the material of heteronormativity in Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica*. The writer also tries to find information related to the queer theories and approaches that will be used in the analysis. However, the main source of the study in doing this analysis is the work itself – Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica* – and the other sources are used to support the analysis. Further, the quotations are provided to confirm and support the analysis of the literary work.

To get further information about the heteronormativity that happens in the main character, Bree, as the transsexual woman, the writers



would see on non-narrative and narrative aspect so the writer can get clear picture of how heteronormativity works around Bree.

By using this method, hopefully, the writer will find how the heteronormativity works around Bree and how Bree negotiates the heteronormativity that happen around her.

### 1.8 Definition of Key Term

The writer uses some key terms that mostly appear in this analysis. Based on the article entitled *Definitions and Myth*, the definitions of these key terms are:

*Transsexual:* People who cross the lines of the sex they were assigned at birth by altering their bodies.

*Transsexual woman:* Refers respectively to female-to-male transsexuals and male-to-female transsexuals. These terms have come to replace the old and demeaning "female transsexual" referring ftm's (Female to Male) and "male transsexual" referring to mtf's (Male to Female) originally found in medical literature.

*Transphobia:* The groundless fear and hatred of crossdressers, transsexuals, and gender benders and what they do, and everything that results from this, from disrespect, to denial of rights and needs, to violence.

- Gender Dysphoria:* The condition where someone feels that there is something wrong in his body and he should change his birth gender into the opposite one.
- Cross-dressing:* The condition where male wears women clothes or woman wears men clothes.