

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This chapter contains theoretical explanation about the concept and other related material that are applicable in analyzing the topic. Queer theory is used to the people who have different sexuality from those who are heterosexual. Based on the *Critical Theory Today* by Lois Tyson:

The word queer is used to indicate a specific theoretical perspective. For queer theory, categories of sexuality cannot be defined by such simple opposition as homosexual/ heterosexual. (337)

Gay and lesbian usually identify themselves as queer, not as gay or lesbian. Tyson said that they are adopted the word queer as an inclusive category for referring to a common political or cultural ground shared by gay men, lesbians, bisexual, and all people who consider themselves , for whatever reasons, non-straight (Ibid 336). Max H. Kirsch said that the assertion of identity of “queers,” notably held as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual, as variants of human behavior that have rights on their own terms. As *theory*, queer’s derivation from postmodernism and poststructuralism leads to the rejection of all categorizations as limiting and labeled by dominant power structures (33). Queer theory is a set of ideas tells identities are not fixed and do not determined who we are. It tells that queer is not the other name of the lesbians’ theory or gay theory

but queer is theory that covers the lesbians, gay and transsexual. Queer is the theory for all the people who have different orientation on their sexuality. They could be homosexual, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual. In other words, queer is the theory for they who are not straight. “We’re Queer and We’re Here” is a necessary declaration of identity (Ibid 33).

From that point of view, transsexual is one of the branches of queer. It includes in this theory. Transsexual is a person who wants to change her or his physiological gender to live in the new gender role. She or he born as the normal baby but as the time go on, she or he feels that this is not what should be. Transsexual is different from transgender and transvestite. John Philips defines transsexual as “persons who are either ‘pre-operative’ or ‘post-operative’ that is, whether or not they have undergone penectomy, hysterectomy, phallo or vaginoplasty” (9). Transgender is people who refuse the cultural norms of how feminine and masculine work in society (Spargo 75) while transvestite is people who like and feel satisfied to wear dress in their opposite gender but they have no feeling trapped in the wrong body like what transsexual feel (Stewart).

Cross-dressing (or transvestism), intersexuality, and transsexuality are distinct and certainly have differing identity implications and affiliations. Yet at the same time all have in common the ability to undermine any sense of a “natural” basis for gender identity and the stability of the relationship between sexuality and biology. (Hall 95)

People who define themselves as transsexual feel that they have another personality inside, not like what people see from their physical body. Most people still can not receive their appearance. The heterosexual people say that they are sick, strange, and abnormal. The theory of self and other also work here. The heterosexual people call them as the “other”. Queer call it as the heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the condition where the heterosexual is the “self” and the homosexual is the “other”. This term specifies the tendency in the contemporary Western sex-gender system to view heterosexual relations as the *norm*, and all other forms of sexual behaviour as *deviations* from this norm (Spargo 73). Gayle Rubin in his book *Thinking about Sex* said:

Sexuality that is ‘good’, ‘normal’, and ‘natural’ should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive and non-commercial. Any sex that validates this rules is ‘bad’, ‘abnormal’, or ‘unnatural’. Bad sex may be homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, nonprocreative or commercial...(14)

continuity, heteronormativity will create the homophobia that is the condition where people who divide themselves as the nonstraight people, are marginalized from their society. They can be fired from their job, do not have friends, be judged as the strange people, discrimination, etc.

In *Transamerica*, it can be seen how the attitude of neighborhood of the main character Bree such as her family, her son, and people around her that always met her in her daily lives, towards her as a transsexual woman. It can be

analyzed using Queer theory to see how the heteronormativity works in *Transamerica*.

Transamerica gives the picture of how Bree as a transsexual people struggles with her own condition. She accepts her condition as people who get gender dysphoria and she realizes that she is living in the wrong body. Weinberg et al in their book, *Dual Attraction "Understanding Bisexuality"* says:

Persons who define themselves as "transsexual" experience what is called "gender dysphoria," the feeling that they are trapped in the wrong body, that their physical appearance (masculine or feminine) differs from their psychological feelings of what gender they are (man or woman). Because of this discordance, they may strongly desire hormonal treatments and genital surgery to make their bodies fit their gender identity. From their point of view, transsexuality is a *transitional* status that should disappear once nature's mistake has been rectified through surgery. (60)

Transsexual is known as a person who feels there is something wrong in his or her body so she or he does not feel comfortable with his or her birth gender and in continuity; they try to change their gender into the opposite one. There are some treatments that usually transsexual people do in order to get into the target gender. It is consistent with S. E Smith in his article *What is gender dysphoria?:*

There are a number of treatments that can be used to transition between genders. The first is hormone treatment, which will physically alter the body. After a set period of hormone treatment,

the patient may consider surgery to modify genitalia and the chest region. During hormone treatment, the patient usually begins to transition full time, dressing and behaving in ways which match his or her perceived gender, and sometimes taking voice training and other lessons to learn how to walk, talk, and “pass” as the new gender. At the end of the treatment, the transgendered individual will have fully transitioned into a new gender.

To be in the target gender is not an easy way. Transsexual people have to pass many things before they can live in their target gender. They have to take some hormone treatments, cross dressing, and some other treatments that can make them sure that they are people with gender dysphoria. For transsexual people, to live in their birth gender is something terrible and they feel that they can not get the happiness if they still live in that body. Madeline, a graduated student, in her autobiography of a transsexual psychology graduate student, writes a letter to her parents.

“It's hard for me to bring my feelings into focus. Perhaps the answer is that transitioning does not make me happy. Transitioning is what makes it possible for me to find happiness. And I'm still searching and I'm still growing.” (Wyndzen 12)

Being excluded from hetero society like transsexual people, give them some problem in *coming out* as the new gender in their society. They know that people still assume transsexual as something “abnormal”. But then, most of them keep struggle with their transition because they know that living in the target gender is

something that can make them happy and comfortable. Since Queer is a large theory that covers all gender outside heterosexual, there are no specific theory deal with transsexual, so the writer will use some theories of transsexual to analyze this study.

Transamerica is a film, therefore, it is also important to use Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin's concept in their book. They said there are five criteria that a film can be categorized as "queer" film. First, a film may contain queer characters and deal with queer issues. Second, is about the authorship. It means that a film can be categorized as a queer film if the director, the producers or the artist is a queer. Third, is about the spectatorship which means that the film viewer dominants on gender and sexuality perceptions. Fourth is the film genre and the last is factors involving the spectators' psychological processes may be considered (9-10). They also stated the representation of queer characters and queer images. First, the way character act or speak. Second, costume, make up and the name of the character that make spectators can identify the character as the queer. Third, the appearance of an object, image and color closely associated with same-sex desire can raise associations with non-normative sexuality (Ibid 15-16).

2.2 Review on related Studies

Since Transsexual is a controversial problem, there have been some researches about transsexual issues. The first research comes from Dallas Denny entitled *Transgender Communities of the United States in the Late Twentieth Century*. In his writing, he tells how the condition and the struggle of the

transsexual people in the late twentieth century. He mentioned that there were many club and communities of lesbian and gay. But they exclude transsexual from their club because they are not clear in their sexual orientation. He also mentioned that the club of gender variant people is increased in the immediate post-Stonewall period (Denny 173). In continuity, transsexual start to be accepted and they start to get their right. Benjamin agreed with their condition, supported sex-reassignment surgery and declared that their condition is not a disorder (Ibid 175). Soon, transsexual start to have their identity and they can participate in the organizations that are previously not open to them such as National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (Ibid 182). Denny speaks how finally transsexual has their identity as the branches of transgender together with cross dressing. So they are not confused whether they are gay or lesbian.

Other essay comes from Anne Vitale Ph.D. entitled *What is the Difference between a Cross Dresser and a Man Who Wants to be a Woman*. She claims that cross dresser and transsexual woman are different. Cross dresser is for man that wants to express his femininity. While transsexual women, in their transition, have to do the cross dressing period.

Other essays from Anne Vitale Ph.D. entitled *Gender Dysphoria: Treatments Limits and Options* said that being gender dysphoria is not something wrong. Gender identity is never right or wrong. It is simply one of a abroad range of qualities inherent in human being. She also argued that therapists are not a people who can define their client identity. Their job is just helping their client to

come to the terms with the implications. They should be ready to support their clients psychologically in the transition progress.

Accordingly, those previous studies will be applied as the comparative and supporting elements in conducting this study. It also as an evidence that the idea contains in this research is original. There might be the other study on transsexual issues with different topics and classification, as the case and sample might be different.