

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

In the western world, Gender identity is classified into two categories, female and male (Morgenroth et al. 2020). The term identity, which is derived from the Latin word “*identitas*”, is understood as a mental image of someone implying the resemblance to people around them with essential characteristics (Steensma et al. 2013a). Meanwhile, gender carries the meanings associated with the social categories of male and female within a culture (Wood and Eagly 2015). The cultural meanings incorporated into someone’s psyches determine how to view themselves which then becomes their gender identity (Wood and Eagly 2015). Gender identity maneuvers in accordance with culturally masculine or feminine attached to men or women to behave and reflect the gendered facets of their identity. Since gender identity is only acknowledged into two, men and women, the opposing classification is called gender binary. This gender norm, telling the binary as mutually complementary, has been viewed as a principle of structuring social interaction.

In most cases, gender identity will be formed through physical characteristics (Steensma et al. 2013). According to the practice in society, it can be drawn that sex, in this context means physical appearance, determines gender (Hyde et al. 2019). Therefore, between gender and sex binary, there are consequential because it does not

only descriptive but also prescriptive. The meaning of descriptive is only explaining the existence between the relation of gender and sex and the concept of the relation between those two. Meanwhile, prescriptive means dictating people to behave in certain ways according to their gender. To simplify, the relation between gender and sex binary enforces individuals to identify as a man acting in masculine traits if they have Y and X chromosomes. On the other hand, individuals who have two X chromosomes grow into a female body and then become a woman with feminine traits (Steensma et al. 2013; Hyde et al. 2019; Morgenroth et al. 2021).

Besides determining gender, biological sex is also linked to sexual orientation. Those who were born as a male or a female predominately have a preference for the opposite sex to become a romantic partner. This sexuality by any chance is inclined with biological make-up, called heterosexual or straight, has become a default in society. Indeed, as a reproduction organism, sexual behaviors with opposite-sex partners are naturally needed as a method for mixing genomes through complementing spermatozoa, acquiring genetic variety and direct utility (Varella Valentova and Varella 2016).

Due to the explanation above, those who do not identify themselves as a male or female and sexually assumed as straight have been fighting over their dilemma in expressing their gender and sexual diversity. These people often call themselves as part of the queer community. Queer community living as a marginalized society in the middle of patriarchal society itself is often discriminated against merely because of the

myths and stereotypes circulated in our surroundings since it they are attached to negative stigma of being sick, or evil. It marks a degeneration for the queer community to perform their identity because they can be misjudged by their 'unusual' behavior as not being part of the binary system. It is the result of a heteronormative in a patriarchal society where people who hold power created this setting. In this society which also creates a system is commonly used as a pressure for everyone to restrict their social attitudes, also as an assumption to behave as sexually normal according to conventional wisdom (Tyson 2006).

While queer demonstrates cross-gender personality traits and behaviors, an imbalance appears in the way they are regarded in a heteronormative society. According to the study investigating the perceptions of queer actions in gender non-conformity, the view that the public sees of queer males is more negative than queer females (McCreary 1994a). Femininity is a set of behaviors which considered unwanted for being looked at as weak, defying the native behavior of males to become assertive according to traditional gender roles. One of the negative stereotypes is because of the culture which puts male femininity on the list of homosexuality, at least as perceived by American men (Tyson 2006). The attribution comes from the perceptions in which sexuality and gender expression are viewed as equalized notions called gendered sexuality. This stereotype expands the idea explained in the third paragraph that sexuality is also determined by gender activity. This delivers the idea in biological sex, gender, and sexuality correspond to each other practiced within a

heteronormative society. In speaking of that, parents, peers, colleagues, teachers, and people around males who deviate from traditional gender role prescriptions disclose concerns, rather than for females (McCreary 1994a). They, queer males, would likely be punished by being rejected from their groups and got teased because of their manners.

Judith Butler, a postmodern feminist, confronts the idea of gender and sexual binary as she wrote in her book entitled *Gender Trouble* in 1990. She proposed the theory of gender performativity which proves the fluidity of gender identity. The same goes with gender, Butler emphasized that sexuality is also an unfixed identity that can be changed depending on internal feelings which are affected by external influences. In the said book, Butler also mentions about heterosexual matrix which theory was obtained from Butler's observations of presumption pointing to sexuality shaped by gender.

A cultural product can be linked to a particular identity including music. One illustration is the connection between specific musical genres and particular gender and sexual identities. *Dangdut koplo* music, for instance, is music that is attached with a sexualized body movement in Indonesia. The rejection of defending an existing image can also be applied to the way music is represented because culturing an image serves as the foundation upon which music is created. In the context of this *dangdut koplo* music, Via Vallen, a new queen of this music genre, takes a stand againsts *koplo* eroticism by inheriting the locality of being Javanese (Riyanto and Dewi 2020).

The study examples above also provide examples of how music can contribute to changing certain stereotypes. Thus, music can be one of the visible vehicles for expressing artistic gender identity and challenging heteronormativity which can contest traditional patriarchal values (Lemos and Luis 2011). This becomes significant because music is a cultural product to convey this issue to help in eradicating discrimination received by this marginalized community. A study conducted by Tan (2018) found that 53 percent of LGBT persons believe they would be lost without music, based on a variety of polls. As a result, the acts and substance of LGBTQ representation in the entertainment business have a significant influence on the lives of these people. Musicians have a societal responsibility to appropriately represent the LGBTQ+ community through exposure and action (Tan 2018).

In the American music industry, the representation of challenging gender and sexuality stereotypes has been visible because musicians become active agents in promoting their human rights for them. One of the portrayals of these unusual behaviors by the musicians can be visible in Conan Gray's *The Story* (2020), *Heather* (2020), and *Overdrive* (2021) Music Videos. In all of his music videos, Conan Gray himself acts as the main character. Conan Gray is an American singer-songwriter who has been active on his YouTube channel since 2013. At first, his contents are about video-logging, then he shares his interest and capabilities in arranging music for several years before officially creating music under his label, Columbia Records. He becomes well-known after his song *Heather* was all over the internet.

The first music video is *The Story* Music Video released on 17 January 2020. In this MV, Gray wants to depict the struggles of youth living in a small city to confront the world which seems cruel to them. The second Music Video is *Heather* released on 20 August 2020, seven months after the previous MV. Like what has been mentioned above, this is a breakthrough song that lifts Conan's fame in the industry. Music listeners show their love for this music video and the song because it is relatable for all people who must at least have a person they desire to be, just like *Heather* described in the song. The last music video is *Overdrive* released on 23 February 2021. The story is about a man who encounters a woman at a railway station and he is falling in love at the first sight. He already imagines having a great time with her despite he has not introduced himself to her yet.

Conan Gray, born on 5 December 1998 in California, is a second child in a mixed-race family whose dad has Irish blood and mom has Japanese blood. Yet, Gray explains on his YouTube video that her mother's family does not stereotypically become engaged in Japanese culture. Since he was born in American society, Gray has adopted the culture within himself even though he once lived in Japan during his infant days for three and a half years. He spent most of his life in Georgetown, Texas after moving from Japan. Then, he moved to California in 2017 after he was accepted as a student at UCLA (Gray 2016).

Within several years after his debut studio album was released called *Kid Krow*, of which *The Story* and *Heather* are the part of it, Gray has been cumulating a million fans of his music in the world. It is recorded that on Spotify, Gray attracts more than

19 million monthly listeners. He has been put in the spotlight of fame in the American music industry because he is entitled as one of the best newcomers in 2020-2021 as a nominee for several prestigious awards such as Gold Derby Music Awards, People's Choice Awards, MTV Music Awards, and more. With *The Story*, *Heather*, and *Overdrive Music Videos*, Gray received praise from the queer community for his performance in representing non-binary people through his gender and sexuality expressivity challenging stereotypes that become a prominent record in the American music industry.

Despite the representation of queer has existed in popular culture, this does not mean merely freedom for queer. In The United States, the practice of heteronormative attitudes are prevalent and may encourage the discrimination against individuals who do not adhere to traditional gender roles (Duncan et al. 2019). The acceptance of the LGBTQ community in American society is decreasing. The report says that in 2015, 71 percent of Americans supported LGBTQ nondiscrimination protections, yet the number dropped after three years to 69 percent (Fitzsimons 2019). Another survey reported that in 2015 93% of LGBT respondents thought that the level of acceptance in society will increase, yet this number has fallen by 10% in 2017. Additionally, the poll respondents claimed that after the election, they have been treated differently. Since Trump took office, 37% of respondents who were asked if they have experienced different treatment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity answered "yes." (Steinmetz 2017). This happened during Donald Trump's presidency when two music videos were released because his administrations undermine queer male community.

The article entitled The Real List of Trump's 'Unprecedented Steps' for the LGBTQ Community written by HRC Staff in June 2020 has listed Trump's administration against them in every aspect including in the workplace, in school, in health care, in families, and more.

Meanwhile, the third object, *Overdrive*, was released a month after Joe Biden's Inauguration. Biden had always mentioned queer rights as one of the key promises of winning an election against Trump during his campaign. He, then, gained LGBT+ organizations' support in hope that he would help marginalized communities to achieve room for freedom of expression (Greenhalgh 2020). As soon as Biden took the White House under his administration, he revoked orders which have a substance of whiplashing the existence of queers (Dive 2021). These moves have marked a winning for gender and sexual equality because they are protected under the law.

There are several studies that investigate these music videos. The first study is Lanie Brice's *One Year of The Story by Conan Gray: Song Review* published on January 10th, 2021. Brice deeply analyzed the song with descriptive analysis. This study found that several teens' general issues raised in the song are about mental health crises, sexuality, and repercussions of bullying. This song, it uncovers the truth of teens' experiences, including Gray's, to face the bitter world which often does not take a side on them.

The second study was written by Lauryn Tauber. Entitled *Conan Gray Leans Into His Vulnerability in Heather Video*, this study was published on August 24, 2020.

The study focuses on reviewing the technical shots which show Gray's vulnerability regarding his jealousy towards someone whom his lover loves. Gray's vulnerability is shown in various close-shot scenes allowing the audience to see his expression.

The last study is entitled *Conan Gray Keeps Shifting Into "Overdrive"* uploaded on February 2021. Written by Tina Benitez-Eves, this study mainly describes the symbolization of Gray's attitude in portraying the essence of reckless freedom in some alternative reality. This study gives an analysis of the context of the lockdown policies due to the Covid-19 outbreak, causing youth who supposedly need to explore the world moping around their house. In consequence, it encourages them to feel the experience of their youth by daydreaming and imagining on their bed.

Apparently, there are several studies discussing the objects of the study. However, the research gap was found that the objects have not yet been examined using a feminist lens. Accordingly, this study aims to examine using this lens, focusing on Gray's manners in depicting gender and sexuality. In order to unveil Gray's representation as a queer musician, the writer conducts this study applying gender as performative and heterosexual matrix theories. After finding the result of the singer's construction of the singer's performance of gender, the writer will analyze its relation to sexuality further. As mentioned earlier, the objects used are *The Story*, *Heather*, and *Overdrive* music videos. A qualitative methodology is used to obtain the data in music videos. The author then utilizes the data using John Fiske's idea of Television Culture.

1.2 Statement of Problems

Based on the previous slides, gender is traditionally viewed as a fixed identity, Conan Gray presents a different view of values in society. In addition, Gray gives an exposure to which gender can refer to sexuality, especially for feminine males. Therefore, the statement of the problems is devised to be as follows

1. How does Conan Gray challenge gender binary and sexual prejudice by performing his gender in *The Story* (2020), *Heather* (2020), and *Overdrive* (2021) Music Videos?

1.3 Objectives of Study

Based on the statement of the problems stated above, the objectives of the study are as follow:

1. To examine how Conan Gray challenges gender binary and sexual prejudice by performing his gender in *The Story* (2019), *Heather* (2020), and *Overdrive* (2021) Music Videos

1.4 Significance of Study

With this research, the readers are able to comprehend gender performativity practices to give a different landscape of gender identity in a patriarchal society. This study also explores a comprehensive understanding to the readers about a practice of gendered sexuality, so the stereotypes regarding it can be reduced. With this

comparative research, it is useful to be guidance in analyzing the practice of gender performativity and heterosexual matrix in music videos as a pop-cultural product.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- a) Femininity: a concept of a patriarchal system which linked to frailty, modesty, and timidity (Tyson 2006)
- b) Gender performativity: gender as a stylized repetition of acts produced and reproduced over time (Butler 1990)
- c) Heteronormativity is the view that there are two distinct genders, each with natural roles that correspond to their assigned sex, and that heterosexuality is a given (Morgenroth et al. 2020)
- d) Masculinity: The philosophy that grants men supremacy and, as a result, an initiative in all sex-related relationships, including marriage (Bourdieu 2013)
- e) Sexuality is a psychological mechanism that directs one's sexuality toward others who appear to be of certain sex which usually refers more to feelings, attractions, or desire rather than behavior or identity (Varella Valentova and Varella 2016)