



An Analysis of Main Character's Gender Dysphoria in Kom Fu's *For Today I Am a Boy*

Sayyidah Nafiza Rafiz Hasibuan ✉

Department of English, Faculty of Cultural Studies, University of Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

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Abstract

This thesis analyzed transgender process in the main character. The purpose of this thesis is to find out and understand how that happens and to look for the two transgender causes found in the novel. The main character in this novel is a boy who always feels confused with his identity. He always tried to find out who he was, find out which identity he felt comfortable with. But as long as he was confused, he did not get significant support from his family, girlfriends and his friends to stay with the gender he had at that time, instead they directed him to follow his conscience. All obstacles experienced by the boy in finding his true identity make this novel interesting to look deeper. The theory used to analyze is Transgender Theory by Susan Stryker and the concept of diagnostic criteria for gender identity disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. The research method used in this thesis is a qualitative method and library research. The author collected the data from the novel and from several sources of articles, books, and journals related to this thesis. The results of this thesis are to reveal the truth that transgender criteria are truly experienced by the main characters and get the causes of the transgender in his daily lives.

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✉ E-mail:

savvidanafiza27@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

According to APA (American Psychological Association), transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. Transgender also includes someone who wears other gender attributes outside the gender concept which has been constructed in the social order of society. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), gender is a trait of women and men, such as norms, roles and relationships between groups of men and women, which are socially constructed. Gender can differ from one community group to another, and can change often over time.

In a psychological view, this transgender action is caused by gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria, previously known as gender identity disorder, is a condition that affects a transgender person, in which a person feels discomfort or feeling depressed because of the incompatibility of biological sex and their gender identity. According to the Psychiatric and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) guidebook by American Psychiatric Association, for someone to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria, there must be a real difference between the gender they believe and gender perceived by others, and must be sustained for at least six month. In children, the desire to change gender must be real and visible, and expressed directly from the individual. The real wishes and beliefs mentioned above are not only desires to get social and cultural benefits from different sexes, but come from within on the basis of the belief that they should not be in a particular sex group, and show consistent attitudes and behaviors from gender opposite.

Based on sources from Bishop and Osthelder (2001: 16) in the book *Sexualia from Prehistory to Cyberspace* in Tiffany (2016), "sometimes some people assume that they were born with the wrong sex and finally have the

desire to live in another sex. This can happen because the individual concerned feels uncomfortable with the sex they have. The feeling of being trapped in the wrong body often starts in childhood". Hurlock (1978: 180-181) as quoted Tiffany (2016) states that, "it such a feeling when a person in childhood has a different interest with his gender (for example, it can be seen from the extracurricular activities he chooses) and his behavior (for example in men he prefers to play with toy dolls)".

Transgender is divided into two, namely trans-man (female to male) and trans-women (male to female). Transgender also expresses its gender identity in various ways, the way that is often done is cross-dressing and transsexual. Cross-dressing is the activity of wearing clothes that are contrary to their gender which is usually done to show the disgust of transgender towards the gender they have, while transsexual is a strong desire to change their sex with the aim of permanently living as someone who has a gender different from the gender they have from birth.

The phenomena above make me curious about what they really feel to their condition, what reasons and factors make them think of crossing their nature. The subject of gender dysphoria is still often considered taboo. In fact, this is important to discuss to open up people's thinking about one of these social problems. This is the reason I chose the gender dysphoria problem to be the title of my thesis. I want to find out the problems that exist from the side of the gender dysphoria self. Some authors have also discussed this issue from various sides such as health, law, social life and others. These opinions are written in the form of journals, books and even novels that tell the story of the lives of transgender people.

Annastaya Tyandias Kusuma (2015) made a thesis entitled *Transgender in Julie Anne Peter's Luna* about how transgender is reflected, what are the causes of being transgender, and what are the effects of being transgender contained in the novel. This thesis helps the writer how to work in analyzing the data that related to the problem of study.

Darryl B. Hill, et.al.write a study entitled *Gender Identity Disorders in Childhood and Adolescence A Critical Inquiry* (2006). This paper critically evaluates the diagnosis, assessment, and treatment of GID in children and adolescents in light of published controversies, evidence, and arguments in psychological, psychiatric, and lay discourse since the release of the DSM-IV. This journal contributes in giving explanation about Gender Identity Disorder.

For Today I am A Boy (published in 2014) is the one that has won various awards such as "Winner of the Edmund White Award for Debut Fiction", "Winner of the Canadian Authors Association Emerging Writer Award", "Lambda Literary Award for Transgender Fiction Finalist" and etc. The focus of the story in *For Today I Am a Boy* is the transition of the main character from male to female. It tells the story of Huang's, an immigrant family, live in small-town Canada while trying to come to terms with the social and cultural changes affecting their community.

Peter Huang, a Chinese-Canadian man, born in Fort Michel, Ontario, grows up as the only son, with three sisters Adele, Helen, and Bonnie, in a traditional family, while concealing his belief that he is female. Playing with his three sisters, he understands that he is a girl and aspires to embody the femininity of her sisters are easily allowed. Peter's conservative and overbearing father expects him to fulfill a conventional masculine role, but his sisters ultimately encourage Peter to face up to his trans-sexuality. He struggles in her relationship with her father, a dictatorial, patriarchal man who is committed to eradicating his family's Chinese heritage and shaping Peter into an "ideal Western man."

Peter is a soft, vulnerable figure, and his feminine nature encounters brutal moments, including the male aggression that follows him from the school playground in childhood to the restaurant kitchens where he works as an adult. Later he meets Margie, a racist in her 50s, with whom he falls in love, but who treats him like a sex toy. At the same time, Peter is shaped by his self-loathing as a male (he hates his "thing") and his fascination with his physical self and sex. He

admits to having tried suicide for no other reason than because of "the misery" of his family. At one point, his father thanks him "for not shaming me", indicating the sort of social control ruling Peter's life. "Many of those transgender people I met took issue with the way they were depicted in books and TV and films, with a lot of fascination about their physical sides, their bodies and sex but the psychology of it was ignored. The emotions and the mental struggle were not depicted very often."

When he tries to find out who he is, Peter also struggles to find out who the world tells him he should be. After high school, Peter moved to Montreal. Instead of finding a pleasant life that he imagined, he felt more alone than he had ever done. His journey to self-awareness seems to be more difficult than before. One of his visions is to become a woman. He imagined shopping for earrings and cosmetics. A coworker named John, who is transgender, finally helped Peter realize that there were internal changes to think about, not just external ones. At this point, he fully sees himself as a woman in everything..

METHODS

In the analysis of transgender in the *For Today I am A Boy* by Kim Fu, an arrangement of research designs is needed to support the statements that have been written in this thesis. Therefore, simplification of methods is needed. The method used coherently in analyzing certain data from novels to support this analysis is a descriptive qualitative method. Using this method, researchers describe and analyze certain data and provide interpretations about it based on related books regarding subject matter. Data does not come from all texts but rather certain quotations and paragraphs from the novel. Interpretations based on qualitative descriptive methods of quotations, sentences and paragraphs must be coherent with the transgender term which is the focus of this thesis and must be able to support the thesis writer in summarizing the conclusions in the last chapter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After analyzing the data from the novel *For Today I Am a Boy* by Kim Fu, the writer found that there are some strongest criteria in the story that can be a reference that the main character in the novel is a transgender, that were: A strong desire to be of the other gender, In boys (assigned gender), a strong preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire, A strong preference for cross-gender roles in make-believe play or fantasy play, A strong preference for the toys, games, or activities stereotypically used or engaged in by the other gender, A strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy and A strong desire for the primary and / or secondary sex characteristics that match one's experienced gender. The writer also found two causes of transgender in this novel, there are family, dating and friends.

The first criterion: A strong desire to be of the other gender, seen in Peter's expressions in dialogue and his attitude which always leads to his desire to be a woman. The second criterion: In boys (assigned gender), a strong preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire, seen in several scenes in the dialogues depicting Peter often trying to use his sister's clothes, makeup and accessories, wearing high heels instead of buying it himself. Third criterion: A strong preference for cross-gender roles in make-believe play or fantasy play, this criterion is proven when Peter fantasized about having a beautiful body like a woman. The fourth criterion: A strong preference for the toys, games, or activities stereotypically used or engaged in by the other gender. In the novel it is told that since childhood Peter preferred to spend time with his sisters and even played with his sister's old doll when he was living alone. Fifth Criteria: A strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy, that Peter absolutely hates his penis. And the last criterion: A strong desire for the primary and / or secondary sex characteristics that match one's experienced gender, in the novel narrated Peter often admires his sister's body beauty, also once wanted to have a sexy body like a woman.

There are two reasons why transgender can occur. The first cause is due to innate genes from birth. Although these causes cannot be explained in this research literature, but at least this is also evidence that dominant genes can appear at any time. For that, do not rule out the possibility that since childhood Peter already felt that he was trapped in the wrong body and wanted to be a woman. The second cause is social, the cause which is the strongest support factor. When dominant genes appear in the wrong body, support from the environment still allows one to get to know the identity that is seen in him, thus, it is still possible to stick to the gender what he carries from birth. But what happened to Peter, the environment actually shows a lot of roads that do not support it. None of his family members are right to give direction, advice and support to Peter to survive, his playmates always play masculine games filled with violence, pain, torture and ridicule. When Peter tries to have a relationship with a woman, he is always disappointed. None of the social roles lead him to survive and the person who gave him a way out is the one who advised him to dare to follow his conscience. In the end, Peter made up his mind to be transgender.

The Reflection of Transgender

Gender dysphoria (GD) is a distress that is felt by someone because of the mismatch between their gender identity and the sex that is determined at birth. People who experience gender dysphoria usually express themselves to be transgender or transsexual. The gender identity disorder (GID) diagnostic label was used by DSM until it was renamed gender dysphoria in 2013 with the release of DSM-5. This diagnosis was replaced with the aim of removing the stigma associated with the term "disorder". In this study, we can use the diagnosis of gender dysphoria to see whether the main characters in the novel can be said to be transgender or not. In the 2013 fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V), they split the sections into two: Gender Dysphoria in Children and Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Adults. In this analysis, the

author uses the diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria in Children because the desire to be transgender by the main character has been experienced since he was a child. And after analyzing, here are some diagnoses of gender dysphoria experienced by the main character, taken by the writer from the dialogue and narration in the novel.

A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, of at least 6 months' duration, as manifested by at least six of the following criterion:

A strong desire to be of the other gender or an insistence that one is the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender)

Transgender is someone who crosses the gender they have from birth into another gender. They feel that their soul is trapped in the wrong body. This feeling will be followed by their desire to change their gender. In the novel, Peter often says about his desire to be a woman.

“...My own face was softened, blurred at the edges where I couldn't focus my eyes. In the mirror, a white man and a girl.” (p. 15)

Since childhood, his sisters already knew that Peter wanted to be like them, Peter told them. Likewise with his father who knew Peter wishes through schoolwork when he drew himself to be a mommy. His father tried to change it, but with the nature of the father who was so cold, there was not much he did. He invited Peter to do the masculine thing, but apparently did not understand how to parenting children. At a young age, Peter was taught by his father to shave his beard. Of course this is confusing and even frightening for Peter. Peter is not at all interested. He is still the same, still a boy who is confused about himself. The mirror refracts his physical image as a boy, but his eyes look into his female self.

In boys (assigned gender), a strong preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire

Transgender people tend to prefer to wear clothes and accessories that are commonly used by other genders. As an expression of his gender

dysphoria, Peter often performs cross-dressers. Wearing women's clothes and accessories, both those of her sister and those he bought himself.

“The dress, with its tiny waist and stiff, sweetheart neckline—creating cleavage where there was none—zipped smoothly up my back. The silver high heels fit; the clasp on the silver pendant still worked.” (p. 126)

Peter often does his activities in his apartment as if he is a woman. When he does the housework like cooking, mopping, he often uses heels and women's clothes to feel like a woman who is doing housework. He really likes his body that wears women's equipment. He admires every inch of his body when wearing a pretty dress and smooth legs when wearing heels.

A strong preference for cross-gender roles in make-believe play or fantasy play

A transgender will always have delusions and dreams about how he would later become the other gender he desires, as well as Peter. Peter always imagined his ideals and future as a woman. What will he do later as a woman, what kind of partner, what kind of life, even small things like pictures of rooms, body changes and so on.

“I lay down with my head on a cushion. It was my husband's lap. His rough hand stroked my hair. The dolls—small children running barefoot through the grass, a game of chase and tackle.” (p. 148)

In his apartment, Peter seemed to have a different life. He made his own story. With himself wearing a dress, heels, he always imagined she was a beautiful woman. Playing with her sister's old dolls, they are Peter's children. Peter was happy when he acted like a mother, storytelling children who would sleep, imagining that they would be called "mommy" by their children. Lying down in his husband's lap on a piece of cloth, they picnic with their children with toy cooker as if it real. In the novel, it has never been said that Peter explicitly refused to play the game of boys, but many passages indicate that he was much more comfortable playing the game of girls.

A strong preference for the toys, games, or activities stereotypically used or engaged in by the other gender

In this novel it is not told that when he was a child, Peter liked to play girls' games, because he also still played with his male friends. Although there are some parts that explain that since childhood he has begun to be interested in matters relating to women. But when he began to be a teenager, he more often do activities that are usually done by women.

“... a makeup compact digging briefly into my back. I pulled it out from underneath me and snapped it open. In its tiny mirror, there was just a small circle of the center of my face. I fluffed blush onto my cheekbones, trying to sharpen them into Adele’s high angles.

Bouncing near me on the mattress was a pot of violet eye shadow that made me think of an eye forced open. I brushed it onto my eyelids. I wet my thumb on my tongue and smeared the shadow into an opaque layer, all the way from the tear ducts to the outside corners.

... I peered into the compact mirror again. I thought I looked lovely.” (p. 25)

It shows that Peter was very understand about women since he was a child. Every day Peter spends time playing with his three sisters. Since the children also Peter has often used his sister's makeup. He even understood what was supposed to be in the women's bathroom. Not just understanding what is used by women, Peter even has often used it since he was a child. Peter used to be left by Adele to wear her makeup. Peter was very happy to be messing up with his older brother's makeup, using it as if it was appropriate for him. Peter did it exactly as Adele did it.

A strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy

Someone who will or has experienced transgender will feel very hate on the part of their body that is very identical to their gender identity. In women, he would really hate the existence of breasts and sex forms. In men, he would really hate the shape of his penis. The transgender will feel that it is the worst body part he has, thus it will be the biggest obstacle for him to be able to do transgender

“...Boys were ugly and foreign, like another species. Like baboons. I was not one of them. The evidence was right there, all the time,

tucked into my tight underwear, but I still didn't believe it. I didn't have one of those things, that little-boy tab of flesh.” (p. 10)

Peter really does not like the existence of a dick attached to his body. Because dick is the strongest proof that he is a real man. Not only hates when he has to check from his dick, but to admit it he does not want. Peter really hates its shape, it's ugly and disgusting for him. Peter answers "no" to all Ollie's questions, it doesn't mean Peter can't like anyone, but because he doesn't think there's something Ollie is asking for. Because even though in outward appearance he has changed himself so that others can recognize that he is a woman, but as long as the thing is still in his body, Peter will still be haunted that he is a man.

A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics that match one's experienced gender

Peter's desire to transgender to become a woman makes Peter admire a lot of female figures who might be used as a reference as an illustration of how the figure of himself that he wants later. As beautiful and sexy as what, what kind of woman will be, and so on.

“...A poster by the door showed a woman doing some kind of twist, one foot in the air. She wore red spandex shorts and a halter bra, her defined abs and cleavage oiled. “How do you look like that?” I said aloud.

Ollie took the question at face value. “Diet and exercise. I'm doing a bulk. If you want to look like her, you'll have to keep your body fat quite low.” He didn't seem to think there was anything strange about my wanting to look like her—like it was as legitimate as his desire to be hulking and large. Another thing we had in common: we wanted different bodies than our own.

... My eyes kept drifting back to the poster of the girl. When I looked at it again, I couldn't tell if was in fact oil or if she was just that slick with sweat. Droplets clouded the air around her ponytail. “What about her legs? How do you get legs like hers?” (p. 63-64)

The sexy woman on the poster attached to the entrance to the gym is the woman with the body Peter wants to achieve. Peter thinks that a sexy body like that woman is the most ideal body shape he must have as a woman. All men will like

it if he also has a body like that woman. He asked his friend Ollie how to get a body like that, he practiced hard enough and seriously, Peter really wanted that body to form on him too.

The Causes of Transgender

Genes/Hormones

In this analysis, it could be possible that Peter has excess X chromosomes so that the dominant trait in him is female. However, we cannot analyze too biologically in this analysis.

Social

1) Family

In determining the growth and development of a child, parents and small families at home is the most important factor that can influence. In this novel, not much is said that Peter received enough guidance and affection when he would grow and develop as a man. This is one of the factors why Peter finally chose to be transgender.

“...Adele whispered close to my ear, “You can be pretty. You can be pretty.” (p. 12)

When Adele found out that Peter had wanted to be a woman since childhood, Adele could not even bear to see Peter cry because Helen had denied Peter's wishes, Adele persuaded Peter which precisely was the spirit for Peter that he really could be like Adele. Adele's words actually make Peter increasingly do not believe in his condition at birth.

2) Dating

The romance Peter lived was also not going well, both of his love stories ended in disappointment. Peter's relationship with his first girlfriend Margie ended up disappointed because Margie felt Peter could not meet her needs. Hi's second date with Claire also ended bitterly because it turned out that Claire was not much different from him. The poor experience of his romance with these two women is also one of the factors that makes Peter more determined to become a transgender.

“...“Do you know Marisa?”

“...“

“...“I do know her, yes.”

“From where?”

“...“

“...“A lesbian bar.”...“Have you slept with her?”

Claire's hand dropped from her mouth and smacked the table. “It's not sex. Women can't have sex with each other. But it is . . . unclean.” She finally looked straight at me. “It was a long time ago.”

“How long ago?”

“Since Marisa? Years and years. Years and years ago.”

Claire looked exhausted that morning. Claire worked for Pathway. “How long since you've—how long since any woman?” She shook her head. I asked again. “Claire, how long?”

“Yesterday,” she said.

“...“

“...“I don't believe this,” I said.

“...“

“...“You cheated on me,” I said.

“...“

“...“I know! I'm weak. I'm disgusting. Disgusting!”

“...“

I pushed my chair back from the table and stood up. “You are disgusting,” I said.” (p. 127-128)

Good intentions of Peter were not welcomed by Claire. Claire, who has been trusted by Peter to be able to change and strengthen him, always advises and reminds him that there will always be forgiveness from God for the mistakes of his servants, has disappointed him. Claire betrayed. Peter is increasingly unable to strengthen himself. He looked at Claire as just the same weak person as him, who was unable to resist the self-incongruity. The disappointment Peter felt because of Claire made Peter think that people like him and Claire were only weak humans who could only be hypocrites. Although Claire seemed disappointed with Peter's decision, Peter knew that Claire had felt freed. So does Peter who despite being disappointed, is actually relieved.

3) Friends

Just like Peter's family and two girlfriends, none of Peter's friends gave him the support to keep Peter in his gender. All the treatment of his male friends made him even less interested in being a man.

“Roger stood up. “New. Game,” he repeated. He used the juice bottle to grind a hole in the dirt the size of the bottle’s base so the bottle stood upright on its own. “Stand three steps back and try to piss in the bottle. Whoever can’t do it has to drink from the bottle.” (p. 9-10)

During Peter playing with his friends, Peter never felt happy, because his friends always play games that are rough, dirty and disgusting. No man's attitude shows manliness or wisdom, only arrogance and delinquency. It actually makes Peter feel that men are rude creature, he increasingly wants to be a woman when he hears girls only need to play jump rope and sing to play.

CONCLUSION

After having analysis, the writer puts some conclusions in this thesis which related to the main character, Peter in the novel *For Today I Am a Boy* by Kim Fu. These are the following conclusion the writer gets. There are six gender identity disorder criteria contained in the novel that can indicate that Peter is a transgender. These criteria are: 1. A strong desire to be of the other gender or an insistence that one is the other gender, 2. In boys (assigned gender), a strong preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire, 3. A strong preference for cross-gender roles in make-believe play or fantasy play, 4. A strong preference for the toys, games, or activities stereotypically used or engaged in the other gender, 5. A strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy, and 6. A strong desire for the primary and / or secondary sex characteristics that match one's experienced gender. All of these criteria have been matched with Peter's speech and behavior in the dialogue and narration of the novel that points to all of the above criteria. For this reason, it can be concluded that Peter is a transgender.

There are two factors that occur transgender, which is the influence of hormones and environmental influences. Dominant hormones that are incompatible with the gender identity seen can cause a condition of gender dysphoria / gender identity disorder in a person

which results in a desire to transgender. This is not explicitly expressed in the novel, but can be evidence that identical hormones can arise at any time, even in the story in the novel, Peter had felt the condition of gender dysphoria when he was young. The second factor is the strongest that caused Peter to decide to become a transgender. Peter did not get good support from his environment. The family does not educate and direct Peter well what a man should play, do and how to grow into a man. Peter's friend always plays the game with rudeness and is not fun. When trying to have a partner, the woman he met always disappointed him. There was no support for Peter to survive. The last friend who encouraged Peter advised him to follow Peter's conscience. Because of all the background Peter experienced, Peter finally resolved to become transgender.

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