

THE TRANSFORMATION OF BEING TRANSGENDER INTO TRANSSEXUAL IN THE DANISH GIRL NOVEL

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Abstract

The study discusses the transformation of a man to become a transgender then to transsexual in *The Danish Girl* novel by David Ebershoff. This study aims to find out how are the process or the transformation journey of an individual to became transgender then to become a transsexual experienced by the male main character. This study is a fiction- based research which uses close-reading technique analysis and applied Queer Theory to answer the research question. The result of study found that there are 6 transformation process of being transgender into transsexual. They are being a female model, started to wear woman clothes as a model, feeling comfortable and wear ladies dress secretly, feeling as a women, dressing up and behaving a like a woman in public, having romantic relationship with a man, having genital operation to perfect gender.

Keywords: Transformation, Gender, Transgender, and Transsexual

INTRODUCTION

Gender and sexuality issue have been massively discussed around the world. On May 2019, the term “Gender Discrepancy” appeared, intended to express the difference between gender experience and gender identity applied (Darmajati, 2022). Since gender identity and human sexuality is very complex and always dynamics, gender and sexuality diversity often become interesting topic in literature, like the one in *The Danish Girl* (2015) Novel. This novel portrays the transformation of a man to become transgender then to transexual.

Gender and sexuality issues have been widely debated around the world. The term “Gender Discrepancy” first surfaced in May 2019, to describre the distinction between gender experience and gender identity (Darmajati, 2022). Gender identity and human sexuality are extremely complicated andd dynamic, hence gender and sexuality variety are

frequently explored in literature, such as in The Danish Girl (2015) novel. This novel depicts a man's transition to being transgender and subsequently transexual.

Transgender is someone who displays an identity in a way that is different from the gender they were born with (Salamor, 2021: 611), which biologically physically transgender has Transgender displays identity way from gender they were born with (Salamor, 2021: 611), which biologically physically transgender has a clear sex, only that gender is perceived differently from sex. A transgender person is someone whose gender identity or expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, a person assigned female at birth might identify and live as a man, or a person assigned male at birth might identify and live as a woman. Some transgender individuals may identify as non-binary, meaning they do not identify exclusively as male or female. Being transgender is about gender identity, which is separate from sexual orientation. According to Butler (2004:6), transgender refers to people with a clear biological sex but live in a way that is different from their original sex. The concept of transgender identities has developed, indicating a shift from a medicalized approach to a more socially informed one that acknowledges the diversity of gender experiences (Wilkinson et al., 2018). Today, "transgender" is more commonly used and preferred because it is inclusive of all gender identities and experiences, whether or not someone undergoes medical transition.

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines "transgender" as an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to the sex they were assigned at birth. This identity might include people who identify as men, women, non-binary, genderqueer, or other gender variations. The term focuses on gender identity, which is independent of physical or medical characteristics, and does not necessarily involve a medical transition.

19 On the other hand, "transsexual" is a term that some people use to describe those who have taken medical steps (e.g., hormone therapy, surgeries) to align their physical appearance with their gender identity. This term is less commonly used today, as it has been largely replaced by "transgender," which is more inclusive and acknowledges that not all transgender people seek medical interventions. Non-binary people who do not identify as

male or female may also have transgender identities (Schilt C Lagos, 2017). The understanding of transgender identities has developed, from a medicalized approach to a more socially informed one that acknowledges the diversity of gender experiences (Wilkinson et al., 2018). "Transsexual" is a term that has traditionally applied to people who want to transition from one sex to another, often through medical procedures such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming operations (Jeon et al., 2022).

This word has become less prevalent in modern discourse since it is associated with a binary understanding of gender and implies that surgical transformation is a required component of transgender identity (Schilt C Lagos, 2017). A significant portion of the transgender community favors the inclusive term “transgender,” as it embraces many gender identities and expressions without requiring medical transformation (Schilt C Lagos, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This study is fiction based-research. Fiction-based research works by integrating creative writing with qualitative research methodologies to convey complex ideas and findings in an engaging and accessible format. It helps researcher seeks to understand and represent human experiences. The data was taken from The Danish Girl Novel written by David Ebershoff (2015). The researchers close reading technique analysis and applied queer theory to analyse the gender identity and gender expression issue in this novel, particularly about the transformation of a married man, to be transgender the become transexual. Queer theory believes human sexuality as something static, unfixed and fluid.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Transformation of Being Transgender into Transsexual

1. Being a Female Model

The processes of being transgender into transsexual experienced by the main character in the novel The Danish Girl from transgender to transsexual are portrayed unplanned, complicated and dramatics and is not simple. The story of being transgender was begun when the main character, Einar, whose profession is a painter, was requested by his wife,

Greta, whose job is also as a painter, to be her painting female model.

Greta appreciated in the door frame. "You sure you won't mind stop pinging for a bit to help me out!?" She said, her hair pulled back, "I wouldn't have asked if it weren't important. It's just Anna's canceled again So, would you mind trying on her stockings?" She asked. "And her shoes?" "Anna's canceled again," Greta said. "She has an extra rehearsal of Carmen. I need a pair of legs to finish her portrait, or I'll never get it done. And the I thought to myself. Your might do" (Ebershoff, 2000:40)

The journey of becoming a transgender and then became a transsexual was started by obeying his wife's request to become a substitute model for her female model who could not come in that day. In that time, the main character. Einar was willing to dress like a female model with complete accessories that should be worn by the female model. Although Einar was actually confused with his wife's request and felt full of inner turmoil, Greta still insisted and asked him to be a substitute model.

The existence of transgender is a long process of an individual both individually and socially, in the sense that a transgender person cannot be separated from strong encouragement in himself or encouragement accidentally given by people around him (Nurdella, 2015: 20). It is portrayed in the novel, how the impulse can arise inadvertently from the closest person, this is the first process of a person in establishing his identity.

2. Started to Wear Woman Clothes as a Model

For the sake of finishing Gerda's painting to be perfect, she did not only ask Einar to wear women's stockings and shoes, but also asked Einar to wear the female dress. "*Do you like it?*" Greta Asked. *He thought saying no, but that would have been a lie. He liked the dress, and he could nearly feel the flesh beneath his skin ripening* (Ebershof, 2000:5). From this dialogue, it can be conclude how Einar began to feel interested in women's dresses and wanted to try them on even though he was embarrassed to admit it. Understanding queer theory, which describes the impermanence of one's identity because identity is not anything fixed with it, leads to a process of performativity through conversations that concern the process of transgender through physical and social performance (Butler, 1999:53).

3. Feeling Comfortable and wear Ladies Dress Secretly

Einar transformed himself into Lili secretly when his wife Gerda was not at home.

The existence of transgender is a long process of an individual both individually and socially in which a transgender person cannot be separated from the strong impulse within time that they accept physical form biologically with what they feel (Nurdella, 2015: 20).

The process by which Einar had become Lili, began to wear women's clothing and accessories thoroughly to perfect his identity as a transgender, but not openly clandestinely, where Einar wore women's clothes and knickknacks when his wife was not at home. Greta began to find Einar secretly transforming into Lili. The next day, when Greta returned from a meeting with another gallery owner, a man who was too mousy and insignificant even to pique Greta with his rejection, she went to kiss Einar. There, on his cheek and in his hair, was the ghost of Lili, the lingering scent of mint and milk. The author describes that Einar began to dress like Lili. Not only that, Einar also began to behave like Lili, who dressed conspicuously with graceful behavior always acting up, behave like a woman and using attributes that are different from his real gender.

4. Feeling as a Woman

At this stage Einar the main character begins to claim that he is Lili and confesses it completely. Einar feels that Lili has been in her body all this time and now Lili has the right to show her identity that has been hidden in Einar's body, here also Einar begins to lose his identity and change into Lili completely.

“Einar isn’t here.” Lili said.

Please tell him to meet me at Central Station for the 11:04 train to Rungsted,” Greta said.

“I’m going to the supply store.”

“What if Einar doesn’t return in time?” greta asked. “What if I can’t find him by then?” (Ebershof f, 2000 :85)

From the quote above, the author unintentionally explains how Einar really doesn’t want to let go of the Lili character within him and begins to feel that he is Lili and not Einar. From that explanation it can be ascertained that transgender refers to people who cross- identify themselves as the other gender which may result in hormonal treatment, this process is what Einar experienced as seen in the text that Einar did not want to free Lili from him.

“He was Happy to meet Lili, and he spoke fondly of Einar. He can’t wait to see you again. Do you remember that?” Greta asked. She hadn’t slept well. Her eyes nearly lost in their sockets. “You promised him that he could see Lili again today.” “It wasn’t me,” Einar said. “It was Lili.” “Yes,” Greta said. “It was Lili. I keep forgetting.” “If you didn’t want her to visit us here, then why didn’t you say so?” “Of course I wanted Lili to visit. It just that....” and Greta paused (Ebershoff f, 2000:71).

The text also shows that Einar began to think of himself as Lili and as if Einar had disappeared and what was inside him now was Lili instead of Einar. That way Einar began to claim that Lili had been trapped in a body of different gender, this made transgender people look and behave like perceived gender, just like a transwomen who are seen as feminist (Rebyta A.P. 2016 : 27).

Einar began, “Sometimes I feel a need to go find Lili.”

He’d come to think of it as a hunger. Not like a hungry stomach an hour before dinner, it’s more like when you’ve missed several meals, when you’re hollow. When you’re concerned about where your next plate of food will come from, if it will ever come. It could make Einar dizzy.

“Sometime I lose my breath when I think about her.” Einar said.

“Where do you go find her?” Dr. Hexler asked.

His thick glasses made his eyes look as huge as eggs picked in a jar of oil

“Inside me.”

“And is she always there?”

“Yes, Always” (Ebershoff, 2000:91).

The conversation abouve really shows that Einar is so sure that Lili is always there within him and he will become Lili, this also drives Einar to transform himself into Lili completely and become transsexual. Butler (1999: 90) says that trance often claims a radical discontinuity between sexual pleasure and the body, which requires medical participation in body parts, either reducing or changing the shape that is not in accordance with the perceived gender.

5. Dressing Up and Behaving A Like A Woman In Public

Making Einar as female model, did not only happen once, but it kept continuing. As a result, Einar felt more comfortable and happier to wear female dress, put on make up, even Einar began to change her name from Einar Wegener to Lili Elbe. He did not only wear ladies dress for the painting session, or secretly when his wife was not at home, but also wear them in his daily life. This scene demonstrates that gender identity is a social construct that involves disciplining the body. Gender and sexuality are not fixed and can change based on how actions, movements, and desires are articulated over time, resulting in the process of identity exchange (Butler, 1999: 54).

The situation when Einar almost became Lili where Einar's character has begun to feel comfortable to continue wearing women's clothes and knick-knacks, become more feminine and went out of the house and attend party with the ladies clothes, walk around in public as Lili shows that the main character in the novel has begun to successfully transform as a transgender. At this stage, the author shows how the main character tries to show his identity as a transgender, because this time he was dare and confidence to appear in public as a woman.

6. Having Romantic Relationship with A Man

To fully achieve and complete himself to be a woman, Lili wanted to be loved, kissed and spoiled like a woman in general. At the party, his presence attracted a lot of men's attention, because his beauty can surpass other women, including Hendrik.

"Are you going out?" Greta asked the first night Lili headed toward the front door, just as the horn of the bornholm ferry was calling.

"For a walk," Lili said. "For some fresh water. It's soo nice to be inside." "At this hour?"

"As long as you don't mind."

"I don't mint." Greta said, pointing to the pile of newspapers at her feet that she still wanted to read before going to bed. "But all alone?"

"I won't be exactly alone." Lili couldn't look at Greta when she said

this, her eyes everted to the floor. “I’m meeting Hendrik.” And then, “But only for a stroller”. (Ebershoff, 2000:60)

Their meeting at the party was the starting point which later encourage Lili to have genital surgery, because she wants to have vagina and uterus and to be pregnant like women. He wanted to have a complete life as a true woman.

7. Having Genital Operation to Perfect Gender

Not only using women’s clothing and accessories and changing her name to Lili, Einar wanted to perfect her gender by performing genital operation, and changed his body shape according to his gender desired.

“But Dr. Buson thinks he can help Einar change,” Carliste said. “Is your doctor proposing the same thing? Did he say anything about the drills through the forehead?”

“Professor Bolk thinks he can change Einar into a woman,” Greta said
“Not mentally, but physically.” Carliste said “But how?”

Through surgery, Greta said. “There are three surgeries that the professor wants to try.”

“I don’t think I understand” “Trust me.”

“Of course I trust you. But what kind of surgery?” “Transforming surgery.” (Ebershoff, 2000: 160).

From the quote above, it can be seen that the operation route will be taken by Einar as a form of self-perfection of the gender that he feels, by undergoing surgery, Einar will truly feel that Lili is alive and no longer trapped within herself. There is a lot that trans people will go through to transition into the gender they want to be in addition to dressing and acting like the perceived gender they will also undergo surgery to perfect their gender, such as undergoing sex reassignment surgery(Erickson, 2014: 7).

Buttler (1999: 90) argues that transsexuals frequently claim a radical connection between pleasure and the imaginary, therefore to satisfy that pleasure, transsexuals need imaginary participants in body parts by adding or deleting from what is not done. Even with Einar who felt that the best way for him was to perform

surgery as the desired form of refinement.

“Do you know what they’ve done to me?” she asked. Her face seemed fuller in the cheek and throat, so full that the blade of her Adam’s apple had

disappeared into a little scarf of flesh. Was Greta imagining this, “Nothing more than we talked about.”

“Am I now Lili? Have I become Lili Elbe?” Lili Said “You’ve always been Lili.” Greta Said

“Yes, but if I were to look down there, what would I see?” Lili said “Don’t think about it like that,” Greta said. “That’s not the only thing That makes you Lili.”

“Was it successful, the operation?” “Frau Krebs said so.”

“How do I look? Tell me, Greta How do I look?” “Very pretty.”

“Am I really a woman now?” (Ebershof f, 2000:206)

The quote above describes how the results of the first operation carried out by Einar really changed his gender identity. The author illustrates that the first operation process was to remove the part on his neck which is characteristic of a man, Einar removed it to make it look like a woman, by taking this surgically would make Einar really look like Lili on the outside.

As a result of gender noncombination so that it involve transvestism which is a phenomenon where wearing clothes of opposite sex to perform surgery to look exactly the same as the opposite sex in order to feel satisfied from what is felt (Octomo, 2021: 27), this is what Einar did to really change himself into Lili, not only limited to using women’s clothes and changing names, Einar also perfected Lili by doing surgery.

“What is?” she asked. “Your next operation” “But why suddenly?” she asked.

“Because we’re ready with the graft tissue” We should operate tomorrow,” Greta had told Lili about the next procedure, about the ovarian tissue that Professor Bolk

would lay into her abdomen(Ebershoff, 2000:211).

The process of Einar's second operation will be carried out wherein the quote above Einar will carry out the ovarian transplantation procedures the next step Einar to perfect the perceived gender, this ovarian transplant operation is carried out by Einar or Lili using the ovaries of a young girl, with the grafted ovaries on Einar, the role Lili would be whole and Einar would no longer be able to attend.

“What if it doesn’t go as planned?” she asked

“We’ll wait, I want to work with tissue from a young girl.” “All of this is hard to believe,” Lili said. She wasn’t looking at Greta or Bolk. Her face was turned to the circle of girls, who were lying on their sides (Ebershoff, 2000:215)

The operation process carried out by Einar shows the transsexual behaviour experienced by Einar, so that she can fulfil her desire to perfect her gender. Einar performs the operation according to the specified procedure. Einar underwent three stages of surgery to perfect her gender, but only two stages of surgery were explained in detail.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, although “transgender” encompasses a wide range of gender identities, “transsexual” refers particularly to people who seek medical intervention and transition. The changing interpretation of these terms reflects broader cultural shifts and a realization of the complexity of gender identity. The transformation of being a transgender into transsexual experienced by the main character was dramatically easy and risky. The transformation journey was started from being a female model, started to wear woman clothes as a model, feeling comfortable and wear ladies dress secretly, feeling as a woman, dressing up and behaving like a woman in public, having romantic relationship with a man, having genital operation to perfect gender

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