

Gender Dysphoria in *When The Moon Was Ours* Novel By Anna Marie Mclemore

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses gender dysphoria in *When the Moon Was Ours* novel by Anna-Marie McLemore as reflected by the main character named Samir. Samir was born as a girl called Samira who got an uneasy feeling with his gender identity. Gender dysphoria is uneasy feeling associated with the incongruence wherein gender identity does not match one's biological sex. This research aims to find out the characteristics, the causes and the impacts of gender dysphoria in the novel. In this research, the writer uses the theory by the American Psychiatric Association to ensure characteristics and impacts of gender dysphoria and another theory by Susan Stryker to determine its causes. The writer also uses Queer theory as proponent in formulating problems. Kind of research is library research with descriptive qualitative methods. Source of data of the research is a novel, several sources of journal, books and articles related to this thesis. Research findings shows that first, gender dysphoria characteristics experienced by main character tends to inconsistency between sex and gender identity, a desire to erase the primary or secondary sex characteristics, a desire to have primary or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender, a desire to be a figure of the other gender, a desire to be treated as the other gender and a desire to have typical feeling as the other gender. The second, causes of gender dysphoria is due to social and cultural factors, it contains a Pakistani tradition called *Bacha Posh* and the emotional dynamics he had in his family. The last, the impacts of gender dysphoria are anxiety disorder, suicide attempts, functioning at school may be disturbed, stigmatization, discrimination and tends to get negative self-concept.

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1. Introduction

Discourse about gender and sex is often translated similarly by society perception. In fact, both are different in meaning. Sex refers to the biological distinction between male and female reproductive organs and functions (Nagoshi, et.al:2013). It has to do with basic sex features. As

we all know, features that are directly related to the reproductive system, such as the testicle, penis, and Adam's apple in men, are known as reproductive features. For females, there are ovaries, uterus and vagina. These feature of sex are God"s gifts that cannot be exchanged.

Gender, on the other hand, has to do with the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female. When it comes to gender identification, it refers to how a person perceives himself or herself (or thinks of himself or herself) as male or female, as well as how masculine or feminine he or she feels. Gender identity is frequently linked to gender roles. The way people embrace cultural norms for maleness or femaleness is referred to as gender roles. This includes, but is not limited to, academic interests, job goals, and other similar endeavors (A.Yarhouse, Mark: 2015). Gender is a distinction between man and woman as an interpretation of sociocultural, it can be said it is a set of roles which is constructed by society as to how to be a man or woman. This set of behaviour includes appearance, attitude, personality, sexuality, responsibility and so on. Gender identity disorders are defined by strong and persistent cross-gender identification, as well as chronic discomfort with one's assigned sex, according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA: 1994). Someone with gender identity disorder feels like he or she traps in the wrong body. He or she feels incongruity with their own sex so as there is the desire to be someone in opposite sex. Psychologically, this is called gender dysphoria.

Gender dysphoria is a distressing feeling caused by incongruence between one's psychological and emotional gender identity and one's biological sex. Gender dysphoria is the experience of being born male (biological sex) but having a psychological and emotional identification as a female on the one hand. Gender dysphoria is the experience of being born female (biological sex) but identifying as masculine psychologically or emotionally. Both professional and popular treatment of the phenomena reflect the changing culture. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) represented a shift away from gender identity disorders and toward the term gender dysphoria in professional literature to decrease stigma (Azisah, et al: 2016).

Based on the phenomenon which experienced by Sam, it reflects the characteristics of gender dysphoria. A person with gender dysphoria feels that he or she is trapped in the wrong body and wants to live as the gender he or she believes in. It's characterized by a strong, persistent sense of identification with the opposite gender, as well as discomforts with one's own assigned sex, which cause severe distress or impairment. If it is simpler, if someone was born as a female then she acts in masculine way because she feels more comfortable to act like a boy.

The topic for this study was chosen because the distress of gender dysphoria experienced by Sam is still taboo in society and there are still many people who underestimate this case and do not really accept people like Sam in real life. In addition, gender dysphoria experienced by Sam urges me on exploring more about the characteristics, the causes of gender dysphoria, and the impacts of gender dysphoria itself.

2. Review of Literature

According to Mary Holmes in a book "Gender Sociological Approaches", queer theory argues people's perception about sexuality that those with sexual tendency beyond normal way is not taboo. This theory separates gender from sex and it argues about binary thing in gender as an identity. In this theory, cast of heterosexuality which is regarded as normal thing has been criticized. As a linguistic example, it is a critical critique of modern homo/heterosexual definition that turns in approaches to gender (Holmes: 2007)

"Gender and Sexual Identity Transcending Feminist and Queer Theory," by Nagoshi et al., explains this, "Queer is an identity, a theory about non-heteronormative sexuality, and a theoretical orientation for how identity is to be understood. The term "queer" can refer to the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithical" (Nagoshi, et al: 2014).

As non-heteronormative theory, queer has a tendency to go beyond the limits, and to make it a monolith is not something that can be ascertained. Non-heteronormative is a belief that opposes the view that the most appropriate sexual relationship is a relation between the opposite sex. Transgender as a person who feels incongruence between gender and sex should be seen in normal way as an average person. Some activists declare that there are five sexes, those are female, female intersexed, true intersexed, male intersexed and male (Lois: 2006).

They are not appropriate to be seen equally as heterosexual couple in case of emotional. The word *queer* has become an inclusive term as a cope of joint identity that everyone can have. Furthermore, according to "News Medical Today" website, there are 16 kinds of gender identity, Androgyne Agender, Bigender, Butch, Gender Expansive, Gender Queer, Cisgender Masculine of Center, Non Binary, Omnigender, Transgender, Polygender and Pangender, Two Spirit, Gender Outlaw, Genderfluid and BlaQ/BlaQueer are only a few of them.

Gender is an interpretation of socioculturalism, it can be said it is a set of roles which is constructed by society to be a man or woman. This set of behaviour includes appearance,

attitude, personality, sexuality, responsibility and so on (Azisah, et al: 2016). Someone's attitude and manner are influenced by gender role characteristics. This role influences the way he or she faces his or herself, the way to interact with others in prosocial behaviour, creativity level and self-sufficiency. But, it can not be denied that there is a crisis in gender which is often heard with the development of human's mindset in a row. This crisis is well-known as gender identity disorder.

Gender is a fundamental component of a person's personality and sense of self. Gender dysphoria, on the other hand, is a disorder in which the patient believes that his or her gender identity is incompatible with their biological sex. Gender identity disorder, transgenderism, transsexualism, and gender incongruence are all terms used to describe gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria can begin as early as childhood. By the age of three or four, most youngsters have identified their biological sex. Gender dysphoria, formerly known as gender identity disorder, occurs when a person's physical gender does not match their sense of self. Gender is a social and cultural term that refers to being male or female. Dysphoria, on the other hand, refers to a feeling of ease or broad unhappiness (Anandya Mandal: 2021).

3. Method

The descriptive qualitative research method was used in this analysis as the research design. "Qualitative research is a strategy for examining and understanding the meaning individuals or groups attach to a social or human problem," writes John W. Cresswell in his book "Research Design: qualitative, quantitative, and hybrid approaches." The qualitative method is a type of research that uses descriptive data such as people's written words or spoken expressions, as well as their observed behavior.

Descriptive research intends to explain human or another variable which can be described by numeral or word.¹⁴ Thus, research method of qualitative is kind of research procedure that consists of descriptive data and relies on description of narrative. The writer aims to explore the phenomena and explain more about humans and their behaviour by realising in the form of narration using this descriptive research.

The original data was derived from Anne-Marie McLemore's novel *When the Moon Was Ours*. This novel is 304 pages long which was published in 2016 by St. Martin Press. The novel's information is presented in the form of words, phrases, and sentences. However, the author primarily focuses on the sentences that have a propensity and association with the gender dysphoria that a character in this novel experiences.

Data collection is dependent on the data source, including primary and secondary data sources, and hence requires a technique to complete. A data collection methodology is a

method used by a researcher to collect and analyse data, and it is tailored to the issue being researched. As a result, this type of study is library research with data sources from documentary data, and the writer's technique is documentation technique. Documentation is the way to find the data in the form of notes, books, magazines, agendas and so on. In other words, this method is used for reaching the data in the form of notes and other documents which are connected to the research problem. Then, documentation technique is away to be done by finding the data related to the things and the variables in documentary data as mentioned above.

4. Discussion

There are several characteristic that is shown by Sam as main character that support his situation as gender dysphoria. The results show that Samir has overall symptoms of gender dysphoria during the adolescent phase which is include an incongruence between sex and desired gender, the desire to eliminate secondary sexcharacteristics he has, the desire to be a figure and to be treat as the other gender, and the need to have typical feeling of the other gender.

According to the previous explanation, gender dysphoria has its own characteristics based on age. In *When the Moon Was Ours* novel, Sam whoexperiences this uneasy feeling is in adolescence. Some scenes show that he is a high school student and being in love sickness with his own best friend. Gender dysphoria which come from distress tends to incongruence between gender and sex. Put it simply, both are contradictory.

First characteristic is inconsistency refers to dissonance. Someone with gender dysphoria feels like he is in the wrong body. The more they pretend to be what they are supposed to be, the more they feel oppressed. They are comfortable to live a life as who they want to be. They also have a strong desire to show their gender expression. It is better to clarify that the author describes the main character with the pronoun "his" in a whole part of the novel to emphasize the self-concept of the main character. Kind of sex characteristics that is wanted to show by Sam is secondary sex characteristics. From the text above, Sam, who was born as a girl, actually can not hide his aura thoroughly. But since he has been working on the Bonner"s farm to help his mother in economic matters, his appearance has changed step by step because he digs out all of his energy so that his muscles are visible. In fact, the work that Sam does is not suitable for girls but from the word go he felt like he is suitable to live a life as a boy, that is why he takes a job on a farm.

Incongruity between gender and sex as at the first characteristic has correlation with a desire to eliminate sex characteristic. People with genderdysphoria feels strange if they still

live with their original sex characteristic. His secondary sex characteristic is seen on his breast and Sam feels shy if people know his secret. All the time he tried hard to hide the truth that he was born as Samira. Besides that, he did that to anticipate judgement from his friends because school life went bad if he did not keep the secret well. Thus, he always put the binder to cover it when he got dresses for school to support his appearance as a boy.

People with gender dysphoria wish to have sex characteristics of gender they want to get peaceful in their life. It is such a hard life if you live a life with an uncomfortable feeling because of unfulfilled desire. They struggle to strengthen their identity by doing anything to shape them to be more dominant in the gender they determine. Sam feels embarrassed with his original voice. It became a boomerang for him if other boys noticed his odd voice. In this part, it does not tend to appearance of sex characteristic but it is such a something hidden that cannot be seen by eyes. Female pitch sounds higher than male. The typical range of an adult woman is 165 to 255 Hz, whereas a man's range is 85 to 155 Hz. The text above shows that Sam really wants to feel like boys in general. He practices by himself driving his pitch lower to have secondary sex characteristic of gender he determines.

Fourth characteristic is demonstrated by Aracely as she knew everything about him. Aracely knew that Sam's mother knew that Sam wanted to live as a boy. In the former town where he and his mother live, Sam obtained different treatment from society. That is why his mother and him have to stay in another place. His mother seems to support his preference. Sam and his mother are having a serious conversation related to their Pakistani tradition—*Bacha Posh*. A girl who runs *Bacha Posh* as a boy for their family someday will get back their own identity as a woman before they get married. Sam has been comfortable with who he is now. He fits for being a boy and turning into a woman one day is not his desire. He wants to keep it up to the last. His strong desire to keep his life forces him to speak up in front of his mother, to tell her that her only one child can not run a *Bacha Posh* till the end where a person who is in there must change his life to the beginning as a figure she was born.

This part shows how Sam wants to live a life as a boy. Sam has found comfort to grow like the gender he determines. The most noticed thing for Sam is how he can stay in one name only to emphasise his gender. He needs to keep his name as Samir, not Samira as in his past. He actually can not decide the decision clearly, there are so many things to consider even if he stands in his own way. Their conversation above is deep, where Sam does not only talk about changing his name but his body too. If he is ready to keep his most desirable name, he has to be ready to stay with an overall appearance as a boy. Live a life as desirable gender figure.

Beside a preference to be a figure of the other gender, people with gender dysphoria want to be treated as someone of the gender they decide. In life, it is a little bit hard for them to get treatment as they wish. But, they always struggle to get their rights to be treated as well as other people.

When his mother asks him about his choice of what he is supposed to be. Samir really feels like living as Samir. This desire is actually not for running the tradition. He does it because he wants to be a person he determines. The comfort he got to become a boy gives him guilt in believing the discomfort of living as a boy whether he lied himself or did not what he wanted at that time, In fact, *Bacha Posh* is just like a cover to lie to himself that he is a result of Pakistani tradition. He wants to be treated as a real boy, not because of that tradition which changes a girl's life temporarily.

Besides the appearance of the other gender, people with gender dysphoria also want to have a typical feeling and reaction of the other. They want to love and to be loved by someone like other people in general as a fate of human beings. It is such a feeling that someone cannot restrain.

Sam has a typical feeling called love toward his best friend named Miel. Miel is a Latin girl who has lived her life with Sam since childhood. Sam felt doubt to say the truth which comes from his heart that Sam is being in love sickness so as he can not express his heart clearly. He wants Miel to love him not only as her best friend, but as a opposite sex that appropriate to be loved. Like other teenagers who fall in love, Sam does the same way to deserve it.

5. Conclusion

The existence of LGBTQ has become more massive in recent times. Various forms of self branding are carried out on various platforms and places, but this action has negative impacts to the doers. It stems from the feelings that are not in like with sex they have with the desired gender or it is said as gender dysphoria. This literature research done in the novel *When the Moon Was Ours* by Anna- Marie McLemore aims to find out the characteristics, the causes and the impacts of gender dysphoria experienced by Samir as the main character. This research is useful for educating readers about gender dysphoria so that people understand and anticipate by taking appropriate action, to be wise without judging against them with gender dysphoria. The results showed that Samir had overall symptoms of gender dysphoria during the adolescent phase which is include an incongruence between sex and desired gender, the desire to eliminate secondary sex characteristics he has, the desire to be a figure and to be treat as the other gender, and the need to have typical feeling of the other gender.

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