

EXI(S)TING INTERSEX IN ABIGAIL TARTELIN'S *GOLDEN BOY*

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Abstract

Tarttelin's *Golden Boy* narrates about a boy who has two sexes (intersex) bringing them to live in two gender attributes, as a male, and as female. In this condition, he seems to explain that (s)he exists in both and exits the gender construction. Thus, this research problematizes how the novel explains intersex as a power to deconstruct the gender binary. To sustain it, it is important to see Butler's perspective in seeing sex, gender, and the performance/performativity in constructing the gender. That way, it concludes that gender has no relation with sex and even sex itself is the result of construction and performance regularly. Having two sexes does mean that (s)he is genderless, but it shows that (s)he can exist as the way (s)he wants to be, because being subject is not merely about being a single gender performer as what Max in *Golden Boy* did.

Keywords: *Golden Boy, Intersex, Gender, and Performance/Performativity*

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, discussing gender is not far from gender discussion, but the problem is how far gender distributes its categorizing definition? Society considers two sexes in contributing the binary gender of male and female. This perspective stresses a discourse of sexual discipline bordering the masculinity and femininity, or any gender categorizing. This functions to shape the category of structural order. Therefore, male and female becomes the inseparable counterparts, beyond that, just like Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Transsexual relations, becomes the villain of the order. If queers have the tendency to see from the sexual interests, there is one conditional case which is beyond them; intersex whose problem is not merely in the interest but the *doubleness* of having it. This double having (both penis and vagina) conditions an intersex an in betweenness as a subject in existence and exiting from any category.

Intersex may be defined as the blending of both male and female internal and/or external genitalia (Creighton & Liao, 2004). Furthermore, it is a term that can be interpreted not only because of its biological nature but also rather as a gender problem. Sex is always linked to gender construction. It becomes the absolute truth of knowledge. Butler claims and questions how humans generally understand that gender is identified through sex. Gender here is determined by sex. This is what Butler calls a Heterosexual Matrix. Thus, gender can be defined as a process which has neither origin nor end, so that it is something that we 'do' rather than 'are' (Salih, 2002). The meaning of gender as unnatural, a retroactively repeating construction in relation to the fixed meaning can be forced to become stable, "all gender is, by characterization, unnatural 'before [s] he proceeds to unprice sex and gender from what many would accept to be their unavoidable connection to each other'" (Butler, 1986).

Heteronormativity is constructed as the total truth to be obeyed by society without adhering people who have a special condition, for example, intersex. Then it becomes a problem to those who do not belong to the heterosexual matrix. Old perspective acknowledges the existence of the binary gender; masculine and feminine which means that there are two sexes. On the other hand, sex cannot be stabilized and classified into the heterosexual matrix. The notion of gender in Butlerian perspectives show shackles on intersex that must be corrected into the exact gender. This is called normativity. Gender normativity allows people who have a special condition to be normalized into correct forms of sex and gender by plastic surgery and hormones injections.

The notion of gender classification of masculine and feminine is rooted and has been reproduced over and over again, so people who are not included in the heterosexual matrix are labelled as sick and be normalized. In the literary context, the problem can be traced through literary works that can be related to the perspective of the author, whether it exists the intersex or attempt to *exist* it. Tarttelin's *Golden Boy* exists and exits intersex. Max has two sexes (intersex) bringing them to live in two gender attributes, as a male, and as female. Max was raised a boy. His/her parents introduce him/her as Golden

Boy to their social life and environment. On the other hand, Max does not fit in this condition that drags him/her into jeopardy. His/her duality for being intersex is problematic. Tickling matter comes up after what Max does at the end of the story. Being raped and being pregnant conjure a great deal of problems whether he/she stays in the intersex and bears the baby or gets the abortion and choose a single sex to save his/her family name. Thus, (s)he seems both exists and exit the intersex that affects to the rigidity of the binary gender.

METHOD

This study uses Abigail Tarttelin's *Golden Boy* as a material object. Tarttelin's *Golden Boy* was published in 2014 by Atria Paperback. The formal object of this study is intersex to exit and exist as the deconstruction towards binary gender. The data of this research is the text (linguistic unit) that comes from the novel. The data are collected in the form of quotations that can be sentences, clauses, phrases, and words. To acquire the data, reading, understanding, and doing library research was used. The data is analyzed through several steps as (1) Finding and defining the gender structure and looking for intersex in Abigail Tarttelin's *Golden Boy*, this is the earliest step to see how the gender construction structured in the novel, and with the formation of a gender structure, gender deconstruction can be proposed as an offer, (2) thus it exists and exists the binary gender with intersex as a deconstruction; this process is the reactive result of the formation of the Heterosexual Matrix and its emphasis on the intersex discourse is presented.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The most striking difference between man and woman are the physical properties or biological attributes. The man has hairs on his face, masculine chest, legs, and hands indicating that man is masculine. Masculine is the attribute given to man. Male face is marked with a square face, square jawbone, broad shoulders, broad chest, muscular body, and a height that exposes a man's braveries. The gallant man is a stereotype attributed to masculine man. It goes without saying, the woman is in conversely the opposition of man. This structure of gender is described as single-sex and appropriate gender of a humans. Difference comes up in people who have uncommon sex, intersex. To get the finding of this research, the description of the gender structure as the first step is explained into two sections. The first section is the description of the structure of binary gender.

Constructed as a Masculine Man

Max is raised as a boy in a well-known family as his parents are lawyers and one of them will be elected to be a parliamentary member in his town. Max is a perfect boy and it is seen in the description: "He's the football-playing-wonder-boy type" (Tarttelin, 2014). He's one of the most popular boys in town. He is also the captain of a football club in his school. His family, especially Max's father and mother are very proud of him. This condition can be seen as structuring Max into a masculine man. His family introduces him as a boy. Playing football becomes his sports activity that indicates a boy's activity. It is proved by his position of the captain of the football team in his school. He dresses as a young boy in general. He does everything in a boy's way. Thus, Max becomes a boy and is structured as a masculine man.

Max is injected with man's growth hormones and actively playing soccer. Hormone clearance and soccer training shape his body into a masculine man type. Hormone injections are given to maximize and grow his biological traits. "My slim frame has been ameliorated by football and weights and a short course of hormones when I was thirteen. [...] My chest is a good size [...] Well-developed compared to other boys in my year, which has a lot of skinny, scrawny and spotty guys who do not play sports. I'm an OK height for my age [...] I'm five foot nine, almost ten." (Tarttelin, 2014) When he is thirteen, Max's body begins to develop into a male body. He has more muscular torso size than the other boys at his age. Max's body development is better than others at his age. Max's height is also accurate, not too short nor too high. Thus, it can be seen that Max is formed into masculine.

Furthermore, sexuality is postulated and highly supported by a discourse that is structured in sexual organs. Generally speaking, the penis is the reproductive organ of man. It is described in Max statement "I look at my penis." (Tarttelin, 2014). Max's penis contributes to the cement of the male building substantially. The reproductive organs are not only the penis but also testicles which have a function to produce testosterone. Testosterone preserves the sperm. Biologically, this hormone has the main function in human body. It functions namely forming and maintaining secondary sexuality

characteristics of a male. Secondary, sexuality in men includes the heavier sound, hair growth in face or forehead, muscular chest, feet, arms, genitalia, and certain areas that will grow and develop during puberty. Meanwhile, the second function is to develop the growing and maintaining muscles and bones.

By looking at the hormone function given to Max, it can be interpreted that Max is biologically formed to grow into a more male body. Max grows and develops into a masculine man. The most intriguing question is if the construction of knowledge has motives behind the pattern of knowledge. This knowledge is indicated to be always engaged to a power. This issue is also further complicated as it is believed by traditional feminist notions that gender and sex are always related. Thus the notion comes up that sex eventually becomes a gender determinant. If a baby has a penis then it is expected to be masculine or female conversely. Especially sex in its biological in contrast to gender can be said as social and constructive. Later on, it becomes Butler's postulation in her antithesis that gender and sex are the construction of society and there is nothing behind it (Butler, 2004). Thus, it can be said that sex is culturally constructed as gender, of course, sex is gender, and so there is no difference between sex and gender.

Exiting and/or Existing the Intersex

Normative society believes that gender determination is based on sex. This is what Butler criticizes if sex is a gender-determiner there is no difference between sex and gender. It is "a free-floating artifice" (Butler, 1999) and "gender as performance" (Bryson, 2013). If gender is a discourse perpetuated by the traditional feminists then sex is also a discourse. Thus, Max who has a male genital uncertainly becomes a man because he has male genitals. By seeing the other side of Max, he also has feminine traits like a woman. He is portrayed as an angelic boy like an angel of goodness and even of kindness. He is depicted very weakly and this is proven when he has no power to resist Hunter's barbarity. It's hard to say that, but how could a man not fight when he is injured while physically has the attribution to fighting? This problem is not merely about the physical attributes, but the mental attribute which is the one that exists in Max's pre-consciousness, so that he is not necessarily a male-sexed subject but also a woman. In other words, totality in gender categorization becomes divided and even shakes the proposition of a structural and binary gender forms. Max, can be said to have revoked the gender view, and in reality, the exemplified case has proven that gender is not about how the subject in his performativity does the gendering. Moreover, it is about how the gender attempts to make chaotic and oppressive categorization, like the tradition of structuralism that tries to reduce the distance between signified and signifier through signification.

Max who has male genitals and female genitals, in the end, makes himself look ambiguous. It does not necessarily mean that Max does not have a category, but Max here becomes the antagonist, antithesis, and even the supplement needed to destroy the binary construction of gender. People's gender is not defined by sex because gender does not exist and sex is a construction. In short, Max breaks the sexual construction of a subject and is gender trouble for constructed society. Max is a man but he is also as weak as a woman and furthermore, he is also described as a woman but he is playing soccer instead of playing with Barbie dolls like a woman.

His parents chose to raise him as a boy by giving him hormone injections to form a masculine nature as narrated in the following quote "[...] they were encouraged to let him to a male gender [...] the notes stop two years ago. He was almost fourteen, and had just received a round of male hormones." (Tarttelin, 2014). Then, his parents let him choose his sex and appropriate gender when he is an adult. It determines that Max, later on, is able to decide to choose one sex and gender by plastic surgery. By giving choice and freedom to choose, as if for the sake of humanity, but on the contrary, the choice is given to force Max to choose constructed gender based on binary gender. The binary gender that is limited only to heteronormativity. Indirectly, Max is denominated in the category of binary gender. There is no sex and gender outside binarism.

Butler believes that gender is constructed. Gender is a choice (Butler, 1987), but the idea does not seem honest because the choice is available before the presence of the subject. Thus, the choice is not as free. Further, Salih (2002) later explained about Butler's view, by analogizing gender like clothes in its wardrobe which she calls gender wardrobe. The wearer can only choose any outfit in the limited choice provided in the store. Thus, gender is reserved and selected for the subject (Max). Dollimore (1996) refers to Butler's works as "the most brilliantly eclectic theorist of sexuality in recent years" and then a philosopher McNay (1999) claims that Butler's works have influenced the feminine understanding of gender identity.

Max is an intersex. Intersex is stated as Gender Identity Disorder (GID) that must be normalized into correct form of gender. Max's statement can be seen in the quotation "Normal people have XY or XX chromosomes. I have XX and XY [...]" (Tarttelin, 2014) so then when he is asked by Dr. Archie he says that "I'm intersex [...] Like, a hermaphrodite" (Tarttelin, 2014). He does not feel good in his condition. He gets menstrual blood every month when he reaches puberty. Moreover, he gets pregnant. On the other way, his male genital is infertile. How could he choose his sex and gender by this condition easily? He is raised as a wonder boy type. But finally, Max begins to show a 'gesture' not to do plastic surgery to choose the correct form of gender. It can be seen as in the following quotation "But I do know that I'm so glad I did not have the other surgery in the end. [...] It does not feel like I do not make my own choices, but this body is not mine either. My whole body would be a reminder, every day, that I was not brave enough just to be myself" (Tarttelin, 2014). Although he lives an uncomfortable life, he shows to be his own self. He seems to ignore what people say about him. He thinks that people are not determined based on what is between his legs. If Max does the destruction, which is existing the intersex, it goes without saying he affirms Butler's notion of gender. Butler's believes that "gender is not a noun [but it] proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (Butler, 1999).

Max's physical condition is not completely male and not fully female because the intersex condition is a combination of both. His gender identity is determined not because of who he is but what action he does as Butler believes that "Gender is a 'corporeal style', an act (or a sequence of acts), a 'strategy' which has cultural survival as its'" (Butler, 1999). Max will not be accepted by his friends when it is known that he is an intersex, especially people in the town which are holding the rigidity of construction heteronormativity. As stated in Butler's notion, Max will get punishment from the society if he tries to rebel for acting out of norms and gender constructions. Thus, Max's actions are repeated and shown by putting on the outfit and performing as a normal man.

Max (in a man's body) has an interest in the opposite sex, which is a woman and what he does is a repetitive and continuous action (polished to become a man, so unconsciously he has no interest in men). Thus it can be said that Max performs his actions through Butler calls performativity. As Salih (2002) states that "In my view, performativity is not just about speech acts. It is also about bodily acts". Butler also asserted that "Crucially, Butler is not suggesting that gender identity is a performance since that would presuppose the existence of a subject or an actor who is doing that performance. Butler refused this notion by claiming that the performance of pre-exists the performer. [...] it is understood as actuarial, which, as reiterative and citational practices by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler, 1993). Then Salih also asserts the notion of gender that "[...] Gender does not happen once and for all when we are born, but is a sequence of repeated acts that harden into the appearance of something that has been there all along" (Salih, 2002).

Butler believes in a world in which people can live without gender construction by the means that people with the intersex "condition" can be accepted without transforming into sex and gender defined by the construction of normativity. In that way, the subject is free to choose sex and gender in accordance with what he believes without following the existing construction. In another words, the subject is entitled to do and undo their own gender outside the existing gender. It seems that what Max does is in accordance with what Butler believes by maintaining his fixed position as an intersex, even though the construction is still trapped in the gender dichotomy. Max is actively involved in exiting intersex, but because gender binaries discourse was present before the subject, and the subject simply accepts it, inevitably, the subject must be forced to know the construction. The problem arises as the existing intersex. When the subject is aware of the gender binary it is present in its destructive position, then the subject should reject all forms of gendered binary, because it is an oppressive thing. In the *Golden Boy* context, Max tries to minimize the possibility of binary gender by re-destroying the ambiguous intersex. It can be proven that at the beginning of the story when Max is born to the end of the story as he grows older, Max maintains masculine traits, in another word he does repeatedly acts as a masculine man.

Max affects the parallel and dualistic condition by demonstrating the symbolic power that enforced him. He criticizes social crisis that affects intersex people or who are not listed in the binarism. In another word, he experiences more cruel things from the social fact and dauntlessly reveals the cruelty of society's construction of gender toward a subject. From this first point, Max can certainly be

assumed to chase the criticism into a critical foundation of resistant attitudes and refuses to reproduce the power of the binary gender.

Max realizes that the intersex is part of him. He also realizes that he really does not want to be accused of being as weird or ambiguous gender. But, when Max gets to think more about it, the more he leaves the symbolic violence and in the end, he realizes that he does not have to refrain sacrifice just to be accepted by society. From there, Max does not end up himself as a subject attached to the correct form of gender, but a subject that does not want to be identified as male or female. Max refuses to look at people through gender but instead sees people as human beings which are certainly correlating with what Butler emphasizes as *Undoing Gender*.

By not seeing gender, people will be free like the way Max feels. Max does not necessarily become a loser or a strange person because of the outside trajectory of gender discourse in general. Max is a superhero, a true fighter, and even someone who is more honest than the society imprisoned in a banal and constricted gender binary. Max undermines gender issues because he wants to show that gender is a construction since construction is shaped already. So far, gender is the reproduction of that construction.

Furthermore, gender construction experiences some sort of deconstructive erection in its melting to become something more fluid and even undone. By undoing gender, normative society will be trapped in the next gender categorization. They will eventually end up accepting such conditions by creating new markers, new words, or new categories to deal with the mushrooming attacks from the existing figures. This metaphorically describes Max's relation and the society in the novel when Max decides to remain, intersex. They (Max, family, friend, and Sylvie) accept Max's condition. It is explaining how intersex becomes a gender trouble that disturbs the security of a binary gender structured in normative society.

Max creates his own gender-related identity. He is constructed as an agency for himself. If Max is considered as non-binary gender, he must be an in-between subject in the sense of being unidentified, and will certainly get the symbolic sanction of society. Butler (1997) asserts that actually it makes Max aware of who he is and who is still asleep in such rigid and deceptive construction, Butler calls it in the sanctification of abjection in. In the end, the binary gender is very difficult to be thrown away because it already exists before the subject's presence in social order. The binary gender discourse already exists before the subject, so the subject cannot just get away from it. It is depicted in this novel when Max is forced (or voluntarily) to produce this discourse, male and female. However, it does not mean that when this discourse cannot be erased, gender cannot be shaken. In the case of intersex, the subject is in the *in-betweenness* which indicates that he can be flexible and has an authoritative. Max who decides to refuse genital surgery and stays alive in an intersex is indirectly undoing gender. Max examples performativity by doing his gender.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on what it has been discussed previously, it concludes a simple position of an intersex in the social order; an intersex has a condition that enables him/her to exist in the middle of social sexual-relation, and (s)he exits from any category to exist by him/herself. It is freedom to become. An intersex mode is a deconstructive process in gender binary, it cannot be made or created, it exists and nothing exits it. Just like what Max does, of course, a subject must be perching on a binary gender, male or female. But with two sexes, Max can be perching on both male and female. It makes chaotic category of binary gender and Max, an intersex subject, is part of it.

In accordance to the findings, people should not be seen by the category of gender. Appreciation is given to all people without exception. Gender categorization is not the reason to discriminate and discredit people. In other words, people should not be classified by the sexual genital. By this reason, it opens the understanding of more flexible horizons of gender and sexuality through Butler's notions in criticizing traditional feminists who are less humanist and oppressive to the other.

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