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# AN ANALYSIS ON CHLOE MOVIE: A STUDY OF GENDER IDENTITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER FLUIDITY

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**Abstract:** The LGBT phenomenon is not a novel thing nowadays. Many controversies have arisen in response to whether it can be accepted or not. Some countries, especially Islamic countries including Indonesia insists that this is unacceptable because it violates the Islamic laws as stated in Quran and Hadith. Other countries, especially the western countries considered this to be normal and tolerable. The concern on this issue has also encouraged the actors in the movie industries to create some work representing how this phenomenon occurs. One of which is found in Chloe movie. This gender-related study aimed at analyzing how the gender identity, sexual orientation and gender fluidity were portrayed in the movie. It included how the main character perceive her gender identity and sexual orientation, why the gender fluidity existed and what reasons were underlying such behaviors. The analysis on the movie was carried out by using lesbian/ gay criticism. The result of the study shows that gender is a fluid entity. Admitting to belong to a particular gender identity requires someone to perform some roles which are agreed by the society. However, one's gender identity does not always represent his or her sexual orientation. Some people even change their sexual orientation or gender fluidity. The movie reveals that heterosexual deprivation causes the gender fluidity. Lack of intimacy between husbands and wives may influence each of them to get the intimacy from people of the same gender. Last but not least, communication between husbands and wives plays a vital role to maintain the sexual relations that indirectly maintains the straightness of the gender identity and sexual orientation.

**Keywords:** sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and gender fluidity

#### A. INTRODUCTION

The LGBT (referring to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) case is one of emerging cases in the world now. Though for some counties and religions, that concept remains taboo and unacceptable, in some other countries like in the U.S. they are acceptable. Thus, trying to understand the existence of this phenomenon will be an interesting thing. Discussing about LGBT cannot be separated from sexual orientation and the difference between the notions of gender and sex.

Barale's statement will probably be helpful to understand the difference between them. "Genitals are the given; what we do with them is a matter of creative invention; how we interpret what we do with them is what we call sexuality" (Fox,

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2012: 81). The quotation suggests the difference among sex, gender and sexuality. Sex is biological differentiation that humans are born with. In contrast, social agreement on how humans are expected to behave regarding the sex is known as gender. Furthermore, sexuality is human's perception on how they should deal with their sex and gender. Eckert and Ginet (2003) also point out that sex refers to biological classification which is based on reproduction ability that is given, whereas gender is a social construction building on sex. Thus, sex can be understood as differentiation based on natural or given potential, while gender is social construction building on the notion of sex.

This illustration will clarify both notions presented above. When two babies are born, one is labeled as a female because she has the reproductive ability and another is labeled as a male because he has no reproductive ability. As they grow up, they are expected to behave like what those labels require them to. For example, for the female child, she has to copy his mother's behaviors, to wear skirts, to play with dolls and to avoid going home late. In contrast, the male child has to copy his father's behaviors, to wear trousers, and to play football. When he loves playing dolls, for instance, it will be considered as a weird behavior by the society. From the example above, it can be seen that gender identities rule how people behave in the society. It is not given or based on the notion of sex, yet it is prescribed by the society.

The similar idea is proposed by Butler (as cited in Spiller, 2012: 41) who claims that "gender is contingent and performed". In her book, *Gender Trouble* (1990), she also states that gender is fluid and performative. It means that gender is flexible and changeable for certain reasons. It is also contingent since it is socially constructed and people continue to perform such roles in the society. This implies that bearing a certain gender identity will entail someone to perform certain roles considered as acceptable for the identity if they want to be perceived as normal society members.

Those roles are acted in the society for some reasons. As it is stated by Butler (1998), "gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which functions as a social policy of gender regulation resulting in punishments for wrong gender performance and reassurance for well gender performance." It is clear that the gender performers obey the roles in order to get acceptance and to function well in the society because if they do not perform the roles well (e.g. a man behaves like a woman), they will be considered as abnormal.

The abnormality reveals that the relation among sex, gender and sexuality is very sophisticated. One's gender identity does not always reflect his or her sexuality or sexual orientation. The term "sexual orientation" itself has been described in many ways by many scholars. Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2008) defines social orientation as "affection and/or sexual attraction towards males, females, or both". The preamble of Yogyakarta Principles states that sexual orientation is everyone's ability to have intense attraction in terms of emotion, affection, sexuality and intimacy and 'sexual relations' with people of the opposite, the same or both gender (International Commission of Jurists, 2009:20). Similarly, Human Rights Campaign (as cited in Dembroff, 2016: 1) mentions that "Sexual orientation is the trait that predisposes us to experience sexual attraction to people of the same sex as ourselves (homosexual, gay, or lesbian), to persons of the other sex (heterosexual or straight), or to both sexes (bisexual)." In other words, sexual orientation is someone's potential to get attracted emotionally, affectionally, and sexually to the opposite, same or both gender. The definitions above also shade a light that sexual orientation can be

basically classified into three, namely heterosexual or straight (attraction to different gender), homosexual (attraction to the same sex), and bisexual (both gender). The attraction to people of the same sex can be categorized further into two: lesbian and gay.

Additionally, Gamache and Lazear (2009) give more rigid explanation on each term as follows. A lesbian is a woman who has physical, mental and emotional attraction towards another woman. Gay is a man having physical, mental and emotional attraction towards another man. Bisexual refers to people (men or women) who have physical, mental and emotional attraction towards both gender (men and women). Transgender is someone whose gender and sex are different. This person, for instance, was born anatomically as a man but as he grows up he changes his physical to affirm his claim as a woman. From those explanation, it can be summarized that LGBT is a term used to label people who do not have heterosexual orientation.

Some people who have same-sex orientation tend to deny or camouflage their sexual orientation for some reasons. First, their existence still cannot be accepted in all contexts, and is limited for some extent. Weston (as cited in Fox, 2012: 7) states that "to say 'I am a gay person' assumes the infusion of sexuality into total personhood in a way that might be incomprehensible to someone who touches the genitals of another man or woman in a society without a word for such an action". Second, they are resistance to heterosexism by hiding behind the 'bisexual' identity. Clarke et al. (2010) proposes three meanings of bisexuality. Firstly, people are attracted to both men and women based on attraction to individual person. Secondly, people are sexually attracted to those with the same-sex but 'bisexual' label makes them feel protected against homophobia. Thirdly, people find the term 'bisexual' describes their identity better than 'gay' or 'lesbian'.

Those explanations clearly show how gender identity and sexual orientation fluctuate. Then, the question coming up is the reasons why people change their gender identity and sexual orientation. One of the reason is probably due to the heterosexual deprivation. Blackwood and Wieringa (as cited in Fox, 2012: 14) assume that "females would never self-consciously choose female partners over males if the latter were accessible". It means that lesbian only happens in the situation where women are bereft of access to men.

Despite its controversies, the existence of LGBT gets concerns from various fields, including the entertainment businesses. Some movies are produced to illustrate the life of LGBT. One of the movies depicting the issue is Chloe (2009). This movie was an erotic thriller movie presented three main characters namely, Chatherine (Julianne Moore), David (Liam Neeson) and Chloe (Amanda Seyfried). Chloe, the main character of this movie is a call girl, while Catherine is a gynecologist who married to a college professor, David.

The story begins with Catherine that suspects her husband of being unfaithful. It encourages her to find more information about her husband's affair. Catherine does it by hiring a call girl, Chloe. Chloe agrees to help Catherine. She always reports her job to Catherine. She tells everything she sees and experiences with David. The saddest fact that Catherine heard from Chloe's story is finally Chloe and David have a sexual intercourse. Chloe tells what David does to her in details. While listening to

her story, Catherine seems aroused. The story that she heard remain echoing in her head even after she arrives home and she fantasizes the story to satisfy herself. On one occasion, Catherine comes to Chloe's hotel and asks her to show what David does to her and ends up with having sex with Chloe.

Based on the background and the synopsis of the movie above, this research aimed to reveal how the gender identity, sexual orientation and gender fluidity were portrayed in the movie. Three main research questions formulated included: (1) how is Cloe's gender identity and sexual orientation illustrated in the movie?, (2) how is the gender fluidity portrayed in the movie? and (3) what is the cause of the gender fluidity experienced by the character?

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research was a gender study seen from the literature perspective. As it has been mentioned before, the object of the study was Chloe movie (2009). The data were in the form of utterances taken from Chloe's movie script written by Erin Cressida Wilson which is available at <a href="http://www.screenplaydb.com/film/scripts/chloe.pdf">http://www.screenplaydb.com/film/scripts/chloe.pdf</a>. The analysis of the movie was conducted by using a literature theory, lesbian/gay criticism. Both lesbian/gay criticism and feminism seem to study the similar thing about gender and sexuality. Lesbian was especially originated from feminism. However, these two theories have a different focus. Lesbian/gay criticism especially focuses on defining sexual orientation as an important category of analysis and understanding (Barry, 2002).

The analysis of the research was carried out by analyzing the utterances. The researcher identified utterances spoken by the characters in the script and further analyzed and interpreted them as linguistic proofs confirming a complex relation among gender identity, sexual orientation and gender fluidity is illustrated in the movie. Finally, the conclusion was made to answer the research questions.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the results of how those theories outlined above are applied to reveal the relation among gender identity, sexual orientation and gender fluidity in the movie. The analysis will cover three main sub-parts consisting of Chloe's gender identity and sexual orientation, the portrayal of gender fluidity and the cause of gender fluidity in the movie.

## 1. Chloe is a lesbian.

Though the society prescribed Chloe's gender as a woman, she perceives herself as a lesbian who has emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to women. Chloe has never confessed in the movie that she is a lesbian, yet her words and behaviors explicitly and implicitly affirm the identity. Some of Chloe's talks will be presented as evidence.

- a. Chloe expresses how she adores Catherine which indirectly proves her identity as a lesbian.
- (1) Catherine: (referring to prostitution) How do you do it? Jurnal Equalita, Volume (2), Issue (1), Juni 2020

Chloe : I make myself generous. I do things I don't want to do. I think about

what not criticize, and the strangest things come back to me.

Catherine: Like? Chloe : You. Catherine: Me?

Chloe: Yes. People like you walk into my life.

(Chloe script, 2009: 34-35)

The utterances show Chloe's emotional attraction to Catherine. She describes how Catherine comes to her life and shows her about her true love (in her opinion).

Chloe's affectional attraction can also be seen from the way she is attracted to Catherine because Catherine cares to her. When Cloe and Catherine are in the toilets, Chloe asks Catherine if she has toilet papers while she is crying and pretending that she breaks up with someone. Catherine asks if Chloe is fine and hands some toilet papers under the stall. Catherine's caring attitudes indirectly attract Chloe.

(2) Catherine: ... Are you ok? Can I do anything?

Chloe : ....There's no toilet paper in this stall.

Catherine: ...I have some.

(Chloe script, 2009: 34-35)

Sexual attraction expressed by Chloe can be seen in some scenes in the movie and this kind of attraction is the most obvious sign that she is attracted to women. Many times Chloe tries to have sexual contacts with Catherine by kissing, touching or even having sex with her.

(3) Catherine: (*Catherine talks about she and David, while she is crying*) We used to do everything together, we couldn't stand to be apart for even a few hours. We would sit for one another outside appointments, loving those moments of waiting before we could finally, after an hour or so, touch each other's skin again, taste each other. I always loved his hands...He used to grab me everywhere. It used to be that way. I used to be younger.

Chloe : (Chloe kisses Catherine on the lips.)

Catherine: (Catherine is taken aback. Mainly because she likes it.) I don't know what's happening...

Chloe : (Chloe touches Catherine's hand, moves to kiss her again.)

Catherine: I can't.

(Chloe script, 2009: 67-69)

(4) Chloe : (panicked) Last night wasn't business for me. You know that. It was real. I smelled you. I touched you... Catherine does not want to hear this. (Chloe script, 2009: 83)

Lesbians or gays do not always open about their true identity. Most of them tend to deny it. In the movie, Chloe denies her identity by working as a call girl. It may be a bit strange since a prostitute is associated with feminine style and is usually hired by men to satisfy their desires, yet Chloe stands behind this identity to give her a safer place to hide his real identity as a lesbian. By working as a prostitute, people will never notice what her real identity is. Chloe also appears to consider her job as a role requires her to perform certain acts. She understands well what her customers (men) want her to be and she tries to accomplish that in order to get money and to hide her sexual orientation even if she is not comfortable with it. It can be seen from this narration.

(5) Chloe : I've always been pretty good with words. In my line of business, it's as important to be able to describe what I'm doing, as it is to DO what I'm doing. When to say what. What word to select. Some men hate to hear certain terms. They can't stand specific moves, and then they can't live without others. It's part of my job to know where to place my hand, my lips, my tongue, my leg, and even my thoughts. What kind of pressure, for how long, and when to stop.

(Chloe script, 2009: 1)

Additionally, how Chloe feels and does with her gender identity confirms Butler's idea that gender is 'performative'. Bearing a woman gender identity requires Chloe to do a role play, while actually she does not like to live this way. It can be seen from the following monologue she utters in the beginning of the movie.

(6) Chloe : ...What kind of pressure, for how long, and when to stop...I can become your first kiss. [Chloe's tongue flicks the cigarette smoke between her lips and teeth.] Or a torn out image from Playboy that you found when you were nine years old. Am I your secretary, or am I your wife? Maybe I'm your seventh grade math teacher you always hated...

(Chloe script, 2009: 1-2)

2. The portrayal of gender fluidity is reflected in Catherine character.

Catherine who was once just curious about what his husband did with Chloe, finally involves in an affair with Chloe. Chloe who is attracted to Catherine realizes that there is an opportunity to get closer to Catherine, so she gradually tries to seduce Catherine in many ways such as telling some fake sex stories she had with David. These stories make Catherine aroused. It later encourages Catherine to experience the gender fluidity for getting attracted to Chloe and sleeping with her. Catherine pretends that she wants to know how Chloe had a sex with David, but Chloe is fully aware that Catherine is aroused and also has the same desire with her. Chloe later benefits this situation to touch Catherine.

(7) Chloe

: He couldn't get it up. We tried a few times. He was embarrassed, but I told him I didn't care at all. That I liked it. That it meant we could wait longer. He still was fully dressed, and I was naked at this point. (*This is arousing to Catherine.*) **Does this turn you on?** 

(Chloe script, 2009: 65)

(8) Catherine : *How does he do it?* 

Chloe : What?

Catherine: Touch you. (Chloe gets it and starts touching Catherine)

(Chloe script, 2009: 72-73)

3. The cause of gender fluidity is heterosexual deprivation.

Based on the theories proposed above, it seems that Catherine's gender fluidity is caused by what Blackwood and Wieringa (1999) term as heterosexual deprivation. She does it because her lack of intimacy with David. They rarely have chances to show their intimacy and even to have sexual intercourses. Catherine is longing for intimacy with David. Catherine describes it in (3) and some other utterances as follows.

(9) David : *When did we stop picking each other up at the airport?* Catherine : I don't know.

(Chloe script, 2009: 40)

(10) Catherine: You become more beautiful with every year. Every gray hair, every line. Everything that happens to you makes you so much more desirable. *And I feel like if you were to blow on me, I'd vanish, I'd disappear. I've felt so invisible. So old.* 

(Chloe script, 2009: 96)

(11) Catherine: You and I used to make love three times a day. Then every day. Then once a week. And then we had a child. We had life and work, we were best friends, and then I didn't know how to go from your best friend to your lover.

David: You stopped touching me.

Catherine: I couldn't look at myself. I didn't know who I was. I think I'm nineteen, and then I look in the mirror, and I'm this person who doesn't know how to seduce you.

(Chloe script, 2009: 98)

Those utterances above illustrate how Catherine feels about her husband. She thinks she is not attractive anymore and that what causes David to stop touching her. On the other hand, David himself feels it is Catherine who stops touching him first. This shows that a good communication is needed to help maintain intimacy between

husbands and wives. Furthermore, Catherine's longing for intimacy including touches and sexual intercourses leads her to experience a slight change of sexual orientation with Chloe. It confirms that sexual relations between husbands and wives is important to maintain intimacy which also creates a harmony in a marriage life. McLeod (2020) points out that similar to the needs for air, sleep, drink and food, sex belongs to human's psychological needs in Maslow's hierarchical needs. It shows that sex plays an important role in human's life sustainability. Islam also guides the husband-wife relations and sexuality in Qur'an and Hadith.

وَمِنْ أَلِيَةٍ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِّنْ ٱنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا اللَّهِ اوَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَّوَدَةً وَّرَحْمَةً أَانًا فِيْ ذَٰلِكَ لَأَيْتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُوْنَ And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought (Qur'an, 30:21).

The verse emphasizes the importance of sexuality in marriage. Muhammad (2012) as cited in Hannah (2017) points out three goals of marriage which include: (1) to express libido in order to obtain sexual pleasure, (2) to preserve human life and (3) to feel peace and its beauty. Thus, marriage basically aims to bring pleasure, peace and happiness for both, the husband and the wife. Furthermore, sex in marriage is essential to create strong bonding and intimacy between the husband and the wife.

Your wives are a place of sowing of seed for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish and put forth [righteousness] for yourselves. And fear Allah and know that you will meet Him. And give good tidings to the believers (Qur'an, 2:223).

The verse illustrates the sexual relation between a husband and a wife. There are many interpretations of this verse. One of them is from Mas'udi (2012) as cited in Hannah (2017) argues that the term 'a place of sowing of seed' does not mean that women are passive sexual actors. Instead, women are valued since women provide womb where men can grow their 'seed' to continue their offspring.

Thus, the word 'clothing' in the verse indicates that sexual relations between men and women are mutual. It involves the willingness of both not only to preserve the offspring but also to bring pleasure and peace. This willingness can be achieved by maintaining good communication between the husband and the wife. The movie depicts how Catherine and David become so busy from day to day until which affects their communication. They rarely communicate their sexual desires and each of them has thought that they lost interest to each other. This makes Catherine feel insecure of her appearance. She feels she is not attractive anymore since she gave birth to his son and has stop being intimate with David since then. Similarly, David feels Catherine is not attracted to him anymore. A hadith verse narrated by Abu Huraira also confirms the importance of communicating the sexual desires between men and women.

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ بَشَّارٍ، حَدَّثَنَا ابْنُ أَبِي عَدِيٍّ، عَنْ شُعْبَةَ، عَنْ سُلَيْمَانَ، عَنْ أَبِي حَازِمٍ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ . رضى الله عنه . عَنِ الله عنه . عَنِ النَّبِيِّ عَلَيْ قَالَ " إِذَا دَعَا الرَّجُلُ امْرَأَتَهُ إِلَى فِرَاشِهِ فَأَبَتْ أَنْ تَجِيءَ لَعَنَتْهَا الْمَلاَئِكَةُ حَتَّى تُصْبِحَ ".

The Prophet (\*\*) said, "If a man Invites his wife to sleep with him and she refuses to come to him, then the angels send their curses on her till morning" (Bukhari, 5193).

In the hadith above the word 'to sleep' means to have a sexual intercourse. It does not imply that only the husband can ask the wife to have sex and if the wife refuses it, she will be cursed. Qibtiyah (2003) as cited in Hannah (2017) proposes the interpretation of the hadith from four aspects, namely language analysis, Ushul Al-Figh approach, physiological and psychological condition, and the meaning of the angles' curse. From the language analysis, it is understood that the angles will curse the wife rejecting her husband's invitation when she is not in her period and her husband politely invites her to have sex and does not force her. The Ushul Al-Figh approach believes either the husband or the wife will be cursed by angles when they impolitely reject their partner's polite invitation. Besides, different physiological and psychological conditions may affect their sexual desires. Men have sexual desires to content their physiological needs, while women have them to content their needs of affections (physiological needs) (Adhim as cited in Hannah, 2017). Finally, there is a need to reinterpret the meaning of the word 'curse' itself. The literal meaning of 'curse' seems too much to express the anger of the husband and wife. Therefore, the married couple needs to be more understanding and open to communicate their sexual desires. Kodir (2019) suggests that in mubadalah perpective and method, the relations between husbands and wives must be maintained. It involves the efforts of both the husbands and the wives to serve each other's biological needs. In other words, communication is the key to have a happy and richly rewarded relations. Sexual relations should be understood as worships to Allah.

## D. CONCLUSION

Gender is a role play which is fluid. As people grow, they will keep trying to discover their gender identity. Bearing certain gender identity leads them to follow such roles that they must comply for declaring the identity and to be accepted in the society, while failing to perform such roles will give them punishments. It is clearly shown in the story how Chloe finally decides to commit suicide while she can actually survive because she feels that everything is over she cannot deal with society judgement and punishment after they know her lesbian identity. Furthermore, one's gender identity does not always reflect his or her sexual orientation. Some people are called 'straight' for being attracted to other people of the opposite gender. Some others are considered abnormal when they are attracted to other people from the same gender or to those from both gender. This sexual orientation is fluid or changing. The movie illustrates that heterosexual deprivation is the main reason for gender fluidity in the story. When women have no access to men (intimacy, relationship, sexual intercourse), they may deviate their roles. Another interesting thing found in the story is on how women perceive their bodies after they have

babies and get older. They think that they are not interesting anymore, so they stop getting intimate with their partners. Last but not least, good communication is important to maintain the relations between husbands and wives. This will also maintain their gender identities and sexual relations straight.

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