

THE CHANGING OF THE MAIN CHARACTER'S IDENTITY IN MOVIE *JUST CHARLIE* (2017)

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Abstract

Society constructs gender to distinguish the sexes of men and women. They believe that human is only born with two types male and female. Those are included in the term heteronormativity who have only two gender or sexual orientation options. Queer refers to people who have a gender identity or sexual orientation that differs from their biological gender. One of the terms Queer is Transgender which is a term for someone who needs recognition of gender identity from anatomical gender assigned at birth, or those who are considered ambiguous in their gender. Society finds it difficult to accept the existence of transgender because of the heteronormative. The experience of the story felt by transgender people is represented in the film *Just Charlie* (2017). This study aims to examine how gender identity is performed in the *Just Charlie* (2017) and how is the response of society. The theory used in this analysis is Judith Butler's "Queer" theory, specifically Butler's gender performativity. This qualitative study has resulted in two findings. First, the main character showed the major terms of gender performativity such as an act of cross-dressing, repetition, and revelation. Second, although the United Kingdom is a liberal country, people still cannot be free to choose their gender preference. This study proved that gender performativity makes the identity of gender not only determined by the sexual genital from birth but also something act repeatedly.

Keywords: Gender identity, gender performativity, movie, queer, transgender.

INTRODUCTION

Gender issues that are often discussed and brought up in the discussion of intellectuals have always been one of the warmest and quite controversial topics. Gender issues are back in the spotlight when transgender, queer, and non-conforming people voice, demand justice and accept their gender in a society that adheres to the gender binary. However, their gender identity is a big question among heterosexual people who only recognize feminine gender (generally associated with female sex) and masculine (generally associated with male gender). "Gender is a choice, role, or construction that a person uses. They are free to decide what

gender they want" (Butler137) (Alam, 2016).

Hall (1996) said that "Identity appears as an unresolved space or an unresolved problem". In the space between the many intersecting words. Until recently, we had mistakenly believed that identity was a thought and a fixed point of existence, the basis of a kind of action such as "true self" Logic. But identity is a process, and identity is divided. Identity is not a fixed point, but a contradiction. Identity is also a relationship between others and oneself" (Ramya & M, 2016). Boys will be rational, strong, protective, and assertive, according to traditional gender roles. While sex is not the same as gender. Gender is socially constructed, while sex is

biologically constructed. To put it another way, gender may be distinct from sex. According to traditional gender roles, boys will be rational, strong, protective, and assertive. But gender is completely different from sex. Sex is constructed biologically, but gender is socially constructed. In other words, gender can be different from sex (Meliá-Martí, Tormo-Carbó, & Juliá-Igual, 2020).

Society views gender variations (beyond feminine and masculine) as something strange and abnormal because these people are in conflict with the social constructs that have been adopted and carried out by heterosexual societies. This problem then triggers the emergence of the term "gender deviation" or "gender identity disorder". This term means that there is a conflict between a person's gender and gender identity. The absence of adequate knowledge about gender causes the emergence of information that is confusing and cannot be justified with regard to gender variations, thus giving a negative stigma in society regarding people outside the gender binary. Gender issues are also recorded and immortalized in the world of literature.

Gender is something we do, according to Judith Butler (Butler, 1990). Gender is not something we are born with or a God-given gender from birth; it is also not something we have. Gender is essentially a result of our behavior. Performativity is not something that can be controlled; it denotes

something else entirely. Sex and sexuality performance differs from sexuality and gender performance. It's the same way we put ourselves as gender or sexual beings, with constant or repetitive repetition and revelation of these behaviors achieving connection to others.

In this era, homosexual behavior is no longer a thing which is taboo in people's life. Especially people who live in several large countries such as America whose governments legalize LGBT acts. But the fact that some heterosexuals still cannot accept that decision still does not avoid discrimination and difficulties in freedom of expression for those homosexuals, including transgender people. Discrimination among transgender continues despite LGBT rights in the United States (Nazish, 2020). No matter LGBTQ people are seen and treated as sick, crazy, and dirty. According to research, Americans are overwhelmingly conservative when it comes to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues, but their rights are not equally protected in all states.

This LGBTQ issue was adapted in many films. One of them is a movie that will be discussed in this this research which are considered to indicate a as gender performativity, namely *Just Charlie 2017*. Kind of British movie drama, this film is written by Peter Machen and directed by Rebekah Fortune, as someone who always struggled with her own identity. As Rebekah said in the interview that "she has always

struggled with her own identity, never really feeling she fit in, and that is the things that inspired her to make the film also” (Intosh, 2020). The stars of the film are Harry Gilby, Scot Williams, Karen Bryson, and Travis Blake Hall. Just Charlie film was released on March 11, 2017, by Seahorse Films (IMDb, Inc. n.d.). This movie represents how gender is based on someone's performance but their sex. It's unique in that it's about a young adolescent boy trying to figure out his gender identity, while most movies are about an adult guy.

Study by Hifa Farahdilla Leliyana's from English Department, Airlangga University, entitled The Representation of Gender Performativity in Einar Wegener/Lili Elbe, A Character in *The Danish Girl (2015)* Movie (Leliyana, 2005). Using the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler, Leliyana aims to show how gender performativity is being represented in Einar Wegener or later became Lili Elbe. The finding of this study is that cross-dressing, the repetition of acts, and revelation are the way gender performativity happens on the character Einar or Lili. This film tells the story of a man named Einar who lives in Denmark. He came to be known as Lili Elbe. In the past, Einar posed as a female model for paintings made by his wife until he decided to change his identity as a woman. Einar is secretly wearing women's clothes and in a relationship with a man. Until one day he decided to do genital surgery as recommended by his doctor.

Wuri Rahmawati and Abdillah Nugroho also analyze Butler's Gender Performance On Scarlet Letter Movie (Rahmawati & Nugroho, 2019). By presenting the protagonists who have dominant gender performance in the Scarlet Letter movie, this study tries to explain the problem faced by Hester Prynne as a woman in Puritan and also analyze the factors causing the problems and examine some solutions done by Hester Prynne. Applying the theory of gender performance by Judith Butler, this gets the result that the problem faced by Hester is to adapt the culture in the Puritan community such as activities, dress style, her principles, and others. And different stereotype between Hester and Puritan society is the most factor that appears in this movie. With the finding conclusion that *"people should be more tolerant and respect each other without even consider their gender."*

The study of Gender Performativity in Rizal Mantovani's Air Terjun Pengantin by Anton Sutandio (Sutandio, 2015), explores body images and sexuality, two elements of gender performativity. By using Judith Butler's understanding of gender performativity, this research shows how the idea of gender actualizes between the immortal paternalistic and misogynistic Indonesia and the contemporary Indonesian gender discourses. The movie itself specifically defies the notion of New Orde's of heteronormativity, which upshot enriches the fluidity of the discourse and *"prevents any generalizations of gender*

regimes” (Sen and Stevens, 1998, p. 8).

Unlike the previous research, this study will focus on gender performativity as depicted in *Just Charlie (2017)*. Judith Butler's gender performativity theory (Butler 1990) focuses on Charlie's performances through his act of cross-dressing, repetition of acts, and eventual revelation as transgender. This study also looks at how society reacted to his decision to be a transgender person. This research showed that in *Just Charlie (2017)* movie, Rebekah Fortune uses the character Charlie to illustrate the picture of gender performativity.

METHODS

To represent how the main character who experienced being transgender change his Gender identity in *Just Charlie (2017)* movie, this research was carried out by applying the queer theory by Judith Butler focused on Butler's Gender performativity. First, this study provides a descriptive explanation of what happens to the scene and the transcription. Then, applying Butler's theory of gender performativity to interpret and find meaning from the data. In addition, this research also uses *mise-en-scène* by Louis Giannetti to analyze some elements. The main source of the data is the film itself (*Just Charlie (2017)* Movie). Collected the data by downloading the original film from an online site. On the first step, this study opened the data and watched the film many times. Furthermore, this study also captured

scenes related to the topic which supported the analysis of the data. The scenes captured are the scenes showing Charlie's character performed gender performativity from his act of cross-dressing, repetition acts, and revelation. It also captured scenes that show how people in his society such as his family and his friends treated or responded to him as transgender. Then capturing the scenes and transcribing the scripts, the study found the problem inside the text for then analyzed their narrative aspects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research focused on analyzing the transgender character shown in the *Just Charlie* movie. Using the main character Charlie as the subject of the study. This movie talks about a young teenage boy named Charlie Lyndsay an adolescent living with body dysphoria, or the feeling that they were born into the wrong body. And since the gender issue still considered taboo in society, the research also analyzes how society reaction toward Charlie.

Charlie's Acts of Cross-Dressing

The movie started with an explanation about Charlie, a young teenage boy, who seems happy playing soccer. Set in The United Kingdom as a country that is already known as a country that legalizes LGBTQ. However, the truth is transgender issues in the UK are moving forward still getting a real struggle. A teenage soccer star

Charlie and his father see soccer as a way out of a dead-end factory life for him. But Charlie is struggling with his gender dysphoria and is torn between shedding his male identity and his father's expectations.(Dunn, 2021) Charlie begins his gender transition while continuing to pursue the dream of becoming a soccer star, With dramatic yet surprising results for himself, his family, and his community also.

The act of cross-dressing done by Charlie can be seen through his preference of wearing women's clothes rather than men's clothes. The first scene that shows Charlie's act of cross-dressing is started when he walks into the wardrobe room at his family's wedding. Charlie looked around the room and picked up the heels that women usually wear at weddings. He took off his bluchers, replaced them with the heels he took. He seems satisfied using those heels before his sister enters the room, making Charlie take off his heels and replace them with the bluchers he wore earlier. This is the first scene that shows Charlie wears women's stuff. In this context, Charlie wearing heels is what he wants to do, although the scene of him taking off his heels and replacing them with bluchers as quickly as possible when his sister catches him in the wardrobe room proves he is still hiding them from others. When he wears heels even in a state that no one else can see, it shows his gender preference. At this stage, Charlie's gender identity can be seen. He tends to be a woman

rather than a man.

The scene above uses a close-up shot. The close-up shot tends to elevate the importance of things and often suggesting a symbolic significance (Giannetti, 2001). This scene shows beside Charlie's black bluchers, he wears white heels. The white and black color here often related to the positive and negative sides of someone. Zelanski and fisher argue that the color white can be symbolized, peace, purification, isolation, and spaciousness. On the opposite Klepsch and Logie argue that black can symbolize compulsiveness, or suggest an intellectual (Stolley,2012).White heels symbolized his peace while pretending as a woman and the black bluchers indicate the negative side of Charlie's compulsiveness as a man. These two different sides imply Charlie is still struggling and confused about his gender identity.

The scene uses a medium shot focuses on Charlie seeing his appearance in the small mirror on his hand wearing a headband and pink clothing. The medium shot is a functional shot that contains a figure from the knees or waist up. It is useful for carrying movement, shooting exposition scenes, and dialogue (Giannetti, 2001). In this scene, Charlie is looking at his appearance in a small mirror in his hand when he is wearing a pink dress and headband. Pink color itself usually indicate as girls color. However, Zelanski and fisher argue that pink has associated with calmness, kindness, love,

nurturance, and being unselfish (Stolley, 2012). This is in accordance with Charlie's condition when using it. Charlie, who was initially curious about his sister's former clothes, tried to stick them on her body. Doing this in his room didn't make Charlie feel safe at the sound of his father's voice. He decided to take the package of clothes to a forest near his house and return to wearing it more freely. He seemed to admire himself. The color dominated the scene is green as Giannetti argue that green reflected aloofness and serenity (Giannetti, 2001).

Another portrayal of Charlie does cross-dressing is shown in those all figures above. Both the scenes above use a close-up shot and eye-level angle. The few close-ups in the movie are reserved primarily for the character, forcing the audience to become more involved with the character's feelings. Pans shot as the camera movement, to permit the images to be recorded clearly (Giannetti, 2001).

At the top left, shows a scene of waxing the legs Charlie did in the shower. Basically, men tend to let the hair on their legs, and waxing behavior on the limbs such as hands and feet is a habit that is usually done by women. Another act is Charlie's acting make up which is done sequentially in one scene. Make-up is a part of mise-en-scene, and it can support the performance of Charlie's feminine side. This picture on the

top right shows Charlie putting the blush on the brush, followed by an act Charlie applying mascara at the bottom left, then ends with an act Charlie appears to be applying red lipstick on his lips at the bottom right. Red lipstick is empowering, it draws people's attention especially on the mouth part. It means Charlie used the red color in order to empower his feminine side.

After applying all of that stuff, his father suddenly comes into his room and figures out his appearance. Charlie looked surprised and tried to deny it. It is proved through this script:

Daddy: what are you doing?

Charlie: I don't know.

Daddy: You are not a little kid anymore; you can't do stuff like that.

Charlie: No, it's not what you think.
(00:25:06)

These words "it's not what you think" implies Charlie still trying to hide his true identity. Charlie's way of performing gender shows expresses Butler's idea of a gender parody. "Gender parody reveals that the original identity after which the gender model itself is an originaless imitation".(Butler, 1990) Charlie proved that men can be feminine too. In other words, gender is very fluid. Butler argues that there is no genuine gender (Butler, 1990). That is, one needs to imitate gender which is done continuously.



Figure 1. *Just Charlie (2017)*



Figure 2. *Just Charlie (2017)*



Figure 3. *Just Charlie (2017)*

Charlie's Repetition of Acts

Charlie has to repeat his performativity to be proved that he acts based on the gender he preferred not by the gender he assigned to. Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the body context, sustained cultural duration (Butler, 1990).

After the incident was caught by his father when he was pretending to like a woman by wearing make-up, Charlie began

to struggle with his family. Fortunately, his mother and his sister decide to support him. With the help of his mother who spoke to the coach of his football club, Charlie eventually joined the women's soccer club and quit from his previous soccer club. In that club, Charlie feels comfortable and happy. He needs to know more about his gender identity and learns all about women. The acts done by Charlie are called repetition acts.

In figure 2 Charlie is seen using his older sister's headband and clothes secretly. In this

medium shot of figure 4, Charlie is seen using a hairpin or headband like a woman every time he comes to practice with his new soccer team. This upgrade stage of his action proves his feminine side has been increased. He gets more confidence in wearing girls' stuff openly not even hide it anymore.

Charlie did the repetition of action over and over again, the more he dared to show his true self. Both scenes above use a medium shot, focusing on Charlie and his sister. The visible proxemic patterns of both figure are intimate, that involvement as love, comfort, and tenderness between individuals (Giannetti, 2001). It showing that both Charlie and his sister have a good relation each other.

In figure 5, you can see Charlie's older sister who is doing Charlie make over. It uses two shot and over-the-shoulder which means there are two figures inside the scene, one with part of his or her back to the camera, the other facing the camera. Giannetti argue that a scene which uses a mirror in a movie shows fragility (Giannetti, 2001). Eve, the figure behind Charlie, in that scene, showing expression of the kindness of sister. From the sentence, it can be implied that Eve tried to support Charlie and bring out his confidence. The focus-shifting technique here used for

focusing on the main part of the scene. A shrewdly chosen filter makes the girl stuff foreground look blurry. It is not that hard to predict what is the situation that appear in the scene, because the filtered photography says it all (Giannetti, 2001).

Unlike figure 5, figure 6 uses a tracking shot to capture a sense of movement in or out of a scene (Giannetti, 2001). It is different from push-in or pull-outs, because they do not simply move toward or away from the subject, they move with the subject. The camera tracks with them wherever they go with done purposefully to know where is the character going and what will happen when they get there. Charlie hangs out with his sister to a market doing window-shopping, smelling the perfume's tester, just like what girls usually do. With dressing as a girl, he also put on a long hair wig to be more like a female.

Charlie's repetition reflects Butler's theoretical idea that gender effects are generated through bodily stylization and, therefore, should be understood as mundane ways in which gestures, movements, and styles are of various kinds. is an illusion of a gender-compliant self (Butler, 1990). Gender is an identity that is slowly being constructed and formed by doing a repetition of acts.



Figure 4. *Just Charlie* (2017)



Figure 5. *Just Charlie* (2017)



Figure 6. *Just Charlie* (2017)

Charlie's Revelation

Charlie realizes what he feels or what he has been doing cannot be accepted by his surroundings. Many people asked him to stop, especially his father. After Charlie dressed up like a girl (figure 3), his father suddenly entered Charlie's room and looked surprised by what Charlie was doing. There was an argument that his mother immediately broke up with. As soon as the atmosphere begins to calm down, Charlie meets her father who is being calmed by her mother, and has a small conversation about what happened before.

Charlie: I promise I won't do it again, it's just ... I'm sorry. I am ...

Father: ok ..., ok ..., we'll just move on, yeah?

Charlie: yeah.
(00:30:52)

The conversation proved that Charlie's father was not okay with Charlie wearing and having women's clothes. When he said "I promise I won't do it again", means that Charlie had done things like this and he promised to stop, but in fact, he keeps doing it in secret.

As things go, Charlie's revelation starts when he received support from his mother to join the ladies soccer team. The revelation happens when his mother tells Charlie's dad to get him on the ladies soccer team.

Mother: Mick runs a team that Charlie could play for.
Father: Isn't that the team he's already playing for?
Mother: It's a ... ladies team over in Lichfield.
Father: A ladies team?
Mother: Yeah.
Father: But he's not a lady.
 (00:45:37)

After joining the ladies soccer team, Charlie started to open up little by little about his identity even though he faced so many rejections from society and discrimination towards him, it does not stop his desire to be a female.

In the last scene of the film, Charlie is shown to be a bridesmaid in his older sister's wedding, which means that Charlie has come out as transgender. In this scene, Charlie has received a lot of support not only from his older sister and mother but also from his best friend when he was on the previous

soccer team as well as his father. She doesn't need to feel guilty about her gender identity anymore. Previously she could only be comfortable acting like a woman, wearing women's clothes and make-up in front of her mother and sister, but in that scene, she confidently wore a dress with full makeup on her face, and high heels walked in the middle of invited guests. so many. This scene uses a medium shot and an eye-level angle to focus not only on Charlie's expression but also on her dress. In the scene, Charlie likes to wear complete makeup on his face, with a shiny dress, which is an element of women's clothing. The dress itself can be interpreted as women's clothing that covers the upper body and hangs over the legs. As Butler said that gender attributes are not expressive but performative (Butler, 1990), the way Charlie performs his actions proves that gender is performative.



Figure 7. *Just Charlie* (2017)



Figure 8. *Just Charlie* (2017)

Society's Responses



Figure 9. *Just Charlie* (2017)



Figure 10. *Just Charlie* (2017)



Figure 11. *Just Charlie* (2017)

Being transgender is closely related to being discriminated against by society. Charlie also being oppressed in many ways. The first discrimination seen in the movie is discrimination from his school society. Figure 8 shows that he got bullied in by his school society unexpectedly his best friend also keep distance from him. He tried not to care when his friends made a laugh at him and gossiping behind him. It is proved by the act of Charlie keep walking instead of responding to the situation. He realizes that he is being bullied but he also realizes that there is nothing he could do about it. The scene uses a medium shot with a three-shot

angle. It shows how his best friend stares at him, wondering about his appearance. A functional shot, according to Giannetti, is helpful for shooting exposition scenes, for carrying movements, and also for dialogue (Giannetti, 2001). Public distances as the proxemic pattern to displays of emotion that are considered as bad form (relation) (Giannetti, 2001). The dominant color in these scenes is black. The black school jacket color represents how the situation is. Black is the color of villainy(Giannetti, 2001). It is related to the environment which seems unfriendly towards Charlie, his school friends discriminate against him.

Another discrimination came from several women on their new soccer ball team who did not accept Charlie's existence because they were considered unfair during the competition. It proved by the narration below:

Girls 1: but that's like you, isn't it?
Sophe (Charlie's friend): what are you trying to say?
Girls 2: c'mon sophe. You always chasing the boys.
Sophe: Charlie ain't boy.
Girl 1: Charlie has a dick, doesn't he?
Sophe: you've been looking?
Girl 1: No, but, I'm sure. you've seen it plenty of times.
Sophe's friend: Come on. we're meant to be a team, aren't we?
Girl 1: No, not while he is here. I'm going and I'm making sure he doesn't come back. It's not fair!
Sophe: What's not fair?
Girl 2: I know sophe, why don't you go and play with a boy's team?
Sophe: Cause I don't want to.
Girl 2: Exactly!
Girl 1: Mick should have never put him on the team. We don't need him or whatever the fuck he is, fucking tranny or whatever.
 (00:55:57)

The words "We don't need him or whatever the fuck he is" indicate rejection for Charlie's existence in the team. Same as before, this scene also uses medium shots whenever the cast on that conversation speaks. In this case, the lighting scene that looks dark makes the atmosphere even tenser.

Not only being discriminated against by his friends but also got rejected by his father. After he caught his dress up like a girl, he seemed shocked and carried away with emotion at once.

Father: What are you doing?
Charlie: I don't know.
Father: What do you mean you don't know?
Charlie: I can't explain.
Father: You're not ..., you're not a little kid anymore, you can't do stuff like that. It's weird.
Charlie: It's not ..., it's not what you think.
Father: Ok, take it off.
Charlie: Dad...
Father: No, take it off
Charlie: Dad!
Father: Take the makeup off!!
 (00:25:06)

From the conversation, it can be implied that Charlie's father is not okay with Charlie's interest in wearing girl's clothes. By saying the sentence "you're not a little kid anymore, you can't do stuff like that. It's weird." This phrase used to deliver a message that Charlie should act the same way he supposed to.

At the same time, not long after the conversation, Charlie received physical harassment from his father. Charlie's face black wipers to clean his face while saying "Wipe that shit off your face!". He then rubbed Charlie's face roughly with that wiper.

The scenes above showed Charlie got physical harassment from his father after he found out Charlie dress up like a girl. The scene uses medium-shot and high angle focuses on

how Charlie's father wiped Charlie's face roughly. Giannetti stated that high angles tend to make people look powerless (Giannetti, 2001). Charlie tried to defend himself by pushing his father back until his mother came and saved him. As he became calm down by his mom, Charlie still crying and said that he should be a girl like Eve (his sister). His father getting angrier after heard that by saying "You can't mess about anymore mate! You growing up! You are a young man." The word *man* indicates Charlie's identity that he has from birth. So basically, his father strongly rejected Charlie's performance as a girl kicked him out of the house.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the main character Charlie in *Just Charlie* (2017) has changed his identity by showing the representation of gender performativity. The main character showed the act of cross-dressing, repetition, and revelation. Charlie begins to do cross-dressing and make repetition of the gestures, acts, and behavior that is related to the feminine side (woman behavior). His gender performativity shows that gender is defined by an act that is done continuously. Lastly, he makes his revelation after being supported by his stepmother and sister. Besides small acceptance from his family, Charlie got struggling a lot with the rejection from many sides. Although the United Kingdom is a

liberal country, people still cannot be free to choose their gender preference. Charlie faced this treatment from his friends, his father, and his grandmother. All of them refused to talk to Charlie after found out about Charlie's gender preference. His father tends to ignore Charlie and treat him like a stranger, also got bullied by his school friends. Charlie also got physical harassment from some boys that his girlfriend introduced to him. In conclusion, this study proved that gender performativity makes the identity of gender, not only obtained from what the sexual genital from birth, but also something acts continuously.

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