

Attraction and Sex Symbol of Males in the Eyes of Malaysian Male-to-Female Transsexuals

Amran Hassan and Suriati Ghazali

Abstract—Male-to-female transsexual issues, especially their sexual orientation, has become complicated due to their tendency to regard themselves as women, and are exclusively attracted to men. This paper explores one group in male-to-female transsexuals, which is homosexual transsexuals, and their attraction towards homosexual and heterosexual men. The objective of this paper is to identify aspects of sexual attraction in the body or nature of the men that attract homosexual transsexuals to develop romantic relationship with them. Qualitative methods were used in gathering the data. This includes in-depth interviews that have been carried out on six homosexual transsexuals, which were selected using purposive and snowball sampling. The location of the fieldwork was Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The result shows that facial appearance, specific body parts such as chest, calves and buttocks, and specific social behaviors, especially caring and affectionate, have been regarded as men's sex symbols.

Index Terms—Autogynephilia, gender identity disorder, homosexual transsexual, sexual orientation, sex symbol.

I. INTRODUCTION

Current gender issues, specifically on sexuality, have problematic impact on social fabric of a society, in our case, Malaysia. Homosexuality and transsexuality for example have open the space for complicated relationship between those regarded as the same gender, which impacted the past harmonical social relation and lifestyles [1]. Transsexualism is one of the new social identities in Malaysia that has resulted in the reworking of social space and culture, and has to be experienced with conflict and contestation, especially in the established culture that forbids transsexualism [2]. Most significant is the male same-sex relation – homosexuality – which involves erotic and sexual behaviors as main passions and self-gratification [3]. [4] Suggests that one type of gender dysphoria or transsexualism manifests itself in individuals who are exclusively attracted to men, referred to as homosexual transsexuals. [5] Explores this further and came to a term Autogynephilia, which means 'love of oneself as a woman', to refer to a man's paraphilic tendency to be sexually aroused by the thought or image of himself as a woman. [6] Further supports this and argues that Autogynephilia is a strong internal desire of a man to be a woman, either physically or/and sexually, which proves that

they are female in emotion but 'trapped' in the male bodies.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on male-to-female transsexuals' sexual attraction towards men is still scarce. One among a few is by [7], who discovered that attraction to Male Physique was positively correlated with Sexual Attraction to Males among Autogynephilic transsexuals. It is possible that attraction to the male physique could develop along with the secondary emergence of attraction to males that [5] describes.

Transsexual research in Malaysia generally focuses on factors leading to transsexualism and issues around it, rather than sexuality and sexual attraction. Transsexual persons are regarded as experiencing gender identity disorder. Their existence has led to public debates and concerns on whether they should be taken into society positively, or they should be helped or treated in order to place them back, emotionally, to their to given gender identity [8]. This means that transsexuals, including homosexual transsexuals – or autogynephilia, are regarded as having to face difficulty in their life, either physically, socially and emotionally. Their main challenge is their sexual orientation – that is attraction to a male. Thus the objective of this study is to identify in specific, the sexual attraction of homosexual transsexual towards a man, either heterosexual or homosexual men. The attractive characteristics which belong to a man will be interpreted as specific sex symbols. This study is carried out to fill in the research gap on transsexualism in Malaysia in relation to sexuality and sexual attraction.

[3] Points out that transsexual male underwent drastic changes in their body, gender identity and sexual eroticism. Those who are determined that they are attracted to men stated that these men have some criteria and features – in another word, attractive sex symbols, that draw their sexual desires [9]. The images of the sex symbols are related to the transsexuals' internal desire towards physical appearance and body features of the men. These physical appearance and body features are illustrated as images, which provide them direct or indirect internal satisfaction. Direct satisfaction is related to true relationship between the homosexual transsexuals and the men; meanwhile indirect satisfaction is related to the imagined relationship between them. The second case refers to those who do not have direct relationship with the men they admire, thus, they are simply secret admirers.

Researchers have identified two types of transsexuals, which are male-to-female (MTF) and female-to-male transsexuals (FTM) [10], [11], [12], and [13]. Both kinds have their own means in showing their sexuality. Their

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sexuality is complex and does not limited to only sexual relation, but also reflects in many ways and behaviors in their everyday life. These include their philosophy towards life, ways in giving ideas and opinion, choosing of attire, and the ways they interact with others [14]. For [12] sexuality involves broad meanings in biological, psychological and sociological aspects in both women and men. Many interrelated factors help strengthen the transsexuals in performing ways of life they prefer most, which include psychological and family factors, such as their parents' upbringings [1], and biological factors [15]. Media meanwhile performs as an important factor that aiding the production of transsexual identity, because media text validate a gender identity that contradicts the body's sex [2], [16]. However for [17] there is no clear explanation that accounts specifically the existence of transsexuals that associated with these factors.

III. SEXUAL ORIENTATION THEORY

Sexual orientation theory has been used in understanding the formation of heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and transsexual peoples [18]. This theory explains that there are certain characteristics in these peoples' sexuality, which shaped their understanding and attraction towards the same sex or the opposite sex. Freud in 1922 and 1959 (cited in [18]) indicates that there is an unresolved problem in the stage of 'Oedipus Complex' between a son and his mother during the fixation processes, – a stage in which a boy is fixated on his mother and competes with his father for maternal attention. This resulted in the inability of the boy to express his actual sexual orientation function using his own sexual organ [18].

Tripp (1975, cited in [18]) divides homosexual transsexual in two categories: first, men with lower libido (sexual drive/desire for sex) and attracted to others who have higher libido; and second, men with higher libido and believe that his sexuality is superior to the others. A homosexual transsexual has extremes in its libido/sexuality, whether in its highs or lows, when compared to heterosexual men. The following summary made by [18] forms some basis in understanding homosexual transsexuals:

- 1) A homosexual transsexual will show lower male libido or higher female libido in everyday life
- 2) A homosexual transsexual will show significant changes in his male and female libido in everyday social life
- 3) A homosexual transsexual has higher erotic fantasies towards the same sex (males) when compared to a heterosexual who fantasizes towards the opposite sex

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This paper will explore male-to-female transsexuals' attraction towards the men. Their sexual attraction describes that they are homosexual transsexual (erotic) [19]. As homosexual transsexual they usually have specific, favored images which they figured on male sexuality. They usually described or imagined their favored men based on these sexuality images. They also will experience a feeling of satisfaction when they see images of men's sexuality. Thus,

the objective of this study is to identify images of male sexuality in the eyes of homosexual transsexuals, which attract them to men.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted on a focus group – a homosexual transsexual people – who were living in the area of Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Facilitated by qualitative methods of data collection involving informal, in-depth interview, six (6) homosexual transsexual people were chosen using purposive and snowball sampling. An informant was identified prior to the selection of respondent, in which, his help was crucial in identifying appropriate respondents for the study. The respondents chosen using this method were all Malaysian citizens, in which, five of them are the Malays (a major ethnic group in Malaysia), and one is a Kadazan Dusun (a minor ethnic group in Malaysia). The respondents were in their 20s and early 30s; who were working around the area and studying in a nearby college. This small sample of respondents fit [20]'s suggestion that a small number of six respondents is appropriate for a focus group study that involves a minority group (homosexual transsexual) in a society, while the information are backed with in-depth interview data on specific issues studied. The in-depth interviews were carried out by the authors in August 2012 using a set of themed, open ended questionnaire. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and this verbatim data were analyzed using manual qualitative analysis as suggested by [21], in which, the themes and its codes were given based on the study objective. Content analysis was carried out using respondents' own words, dialogues were interpreted and lastly narrative approach was used in describing and discussing the themes studied, which recommended by [22] as one of the appropriate ways in presenting qualitative data such as this. This study does not claim that homosexual transsexuals in Malaysia are limited to these two ethnic groups, however, a small sample size drew from a majority and minority ethnic groups portray the existence of transsexualism in Malaysia across ethnic groups, thus provide an excellent basis for a transsexualism research to be conducted in Malaysia.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Attraction to Facial and Physical Appearance

Under this theme, 4 respondents (67%) stated that they are sexually attracted to facial and physical appearance of the males. The attraction is external and physical in nature, and it happen after a person sees and meets someone else. This external, physical attraction becomes aspect in which a person can be bonded or attach to the other. Respondents usually evaluate physical appearance as images which they regarded as their 'taste', their 'favorite', or 'desires'. These images provide strong affection for the respondents to start a relationship with the males, either sexually or simply as admirers. Respondents' verbatim words that highlight sexual attraction on physical appearance are quoted below:

- 1) The most important thing is he is in his uniform. He must be good looking, and I prefer if he is taller than me. These are my taste (Respondent 2, Malay, 33).
- 2) His face...every faces are unique. Some faces are like this, others are like that. I love those who have cute, beautiful faces. But he must still a man and he may have girlfriends. I am satisfied if his face is cute (Respondent 3, Malay, 20).
- 3) The part I like most is his face. That's really attracting me. He looks really macho and really manly. I prefer those who have this 'full package' (Respondent 5, Malay, 33).
- 4) What I like most is his face. If he looks okay that means he is handsome, right? I am quite choosy actually - if he is okay with me, then I will be okay with him (Respondent 6, Malay, 20).

The above quotations reveal that facial appearance can be regarded as main sexual attraction for a homosexual transsexual to admire a man. Facial and physical attraction will led a transsexual to make an effort to attract the man's attention. As has been suggested by [6] their admiration and extreme fondness to a male (*androphilic*) made them to regard themselves as a woman (*autogynephilia*). They perceive themselves as truly women; they admire the men physically and sexually, and attract men's attention.

In addition to this, [9]'s study suggests that homosexual transsexuals' admiration to men's facial appearance may affect their sexual orientation towards developing romantic relationship with the men. Their knowledge on sexual needs of a man develops an erotic attraction and affection towards the men. Therefore this paper suggests that facial appearance is the main asset that is regarded as men's sex symbol in the eyes of homosexual transsexuals.

B. Attraction towards Social Behavior

Two respondents or 33% regarded that a man's sex symbol can be seen or felt on his social behavior or social conduct. A man will be regarded as 'good' and 'sexy' if they fit their (transsexuals) expectation. Homosexual transsexuals usually attracted to a man if they feel that he is kind, caring and affectionate. They will make an effort to develop a romantic relationship with the man. Expression of words stated below show the elements of men's social behaviors that attract them:

- 1) I don't know what make me like him, but I like to talk to a man that shows his full attention to me. I love the way he talk to me kindly and look at me affectionately (Respondent 1, Malay, 20).
- 2) The most important thing is he knows how to appreciate me, take good care of me, and know how to entertain me. His behavior must be good towards me. That's the reason I like him (Respondent 5, Malay, 33).

The dialogues above show that the element of caring and affection sexually attracts homosexual transsexuals to involve in a romantic relationship with a man. These elements are expressed in the form of conversation, hospitality, and concern. These elements induce feelings of appreciation and being cared of that made the respondents socially and sexually attracted to the men, and subsequently fell in love with them. These findings supported [12]'s

suggestion, in which, transsexuals in [12]'s counseling sessions disclosed stories and memories of their affection towards their boyfriends, and their boyfriends' kindness towards them, which led them to feel difficult and bitter to forget their boyfriends. Attraction towards sexuality images based on behaviors such as these have deeply rooted in transsexuals inner feelings, which resulted in them to believe that is what they wanted (men's love) for their life.

C. Attraction to Specific Body Parts

Under this theme, there are three respondents (50%) who named specific body parts that sexually attract them to a man. These consist of chest for upper body parts, and legs/calves and buttocks for lower body parts. For the respondents these parts portray the elements of toughness, strength and energetic, which are the symbols of an ideal man to protect them physically and psychologically. These body parts seem to be their first or early evaluation in assessing a man before they decide on whether they are attracted or not to him. They said:

- 1) I like man's chest. If his chest is broad, I feel that he is tough, strong and energetic. Wow, I like the best these strong and energetic men (Respondent 4, Kadazan Dusun, 20).
- 2) I will feel more excited to see men wear shorts such as sport wears, which show his naked muscular legs. For me men with muscular legs are the best (Respondent 2, Malay, 33).
- 3) What I like most in men are their full buttocks and their muscular calves. That is my attraction when I look at these men (Respondent 5, Malay, 33).

The statements above explain that chest, calves and buttocks draw sexual attraction in homosexual transsexuals to admire a man. A broad chest symbolizes a brave, strong and protective person; large, muscular calves and full buttocks reveal a 'real' man – a man with power. Images of strength and perfection in men's physical body parts guide homosexual transsexuals in determining aspects they wanted from a man. These images or sex symbols satisfy them and enable them to continue admiring men who gifted with these characteristics.

These findings support [23]'s study which suggests that elements in transsexual's sexual orientation are too subjective and phenomenological, and are difficult to be understood by many studies on transsexualism except those which are related to sexuality. Our study on the attraction and sex symbols of male body images in the eyes of transsexuals offers an insight on transsexuals' sexuality. Their sexuality, as had been revealed by our study, is related to that proposed by [4] and [5] on *Autogynephilia* or 'love of oneself as a woman', and those by [6] on the strong internal desire of a man to be a woman. Our study however does not explore Freud's Oedipus Complex's theory and thus we suggest that this aspect can be a potential for future research in understanding transsexualism.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper discussed sexuality issue of homosexual transsexual peoples, specifically, their sexual orientation

towards men. Certain body parts and social behavior of the men are regarded as sex symbols, which encourage them to develop sexual relationship with the men, or simply imagined them, in order to fulfill sexual desire. Images of sex symbols form a guide for homosexual transsexuals to become attracted to a man in a similar way a woman attracted to a man. This study enhances knowledge on sexuality of the homosexual transsexual, particularly, their admiration and attachment to men, while adding to the enrichment of gender disorder literature. However, an extension of this study is suggested in order to obtain a complete data on factors related to gender identity disorder such as homosexual transsexual. Therefore it can be useful as a guide for certain governmental and non-governmental bodies that deal with treatment, psychological and moral support in helping the transsexuals to recognize their gender identity.

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