

THE SELF-CONCEPT: A TRANSGENDER PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Transgender is a rather new area of study in different social, behavioral and medical science fields especially in the Pakistani society. Transgender are the persons who challenge the binary system of genders in the society and want some space between or beyond this binary system. The present research paper is a narrative – oriented research on the transgender. The major objectives of this study were to have an account about the self-knowledge and self-concept of the transgender people about themselves and how they differentiate themselves from men in spite of having male biology. For this purpose, qualitative research method was adopted for attaining in depth information and fifteen case studies were conducted by using non-probability sampling technique. The gathered detailed information was analyzed through thematic analysis method from qualitative research techniques. The study revealed that all of the participants of this research study perceive themselves as women and feel comfortable with feminine gender role playing. The study also reveals that in terms of attraction romantic and sexual feelings) towards men, there is no difference between transgender and women.

Key words: Transgender, Self-concept, Self-image, Gender role playing, Effeminate, Gender Minorities, transgender in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Body is the reality of nature. When a child, with a particular sex, comes to the world, he/she is identified with that particular sex and assigned various roles regarding his/her gender. Gender is a socio-cultural phenomenon as different societies expect different roles from one gender (Salani et al., 2005). There is a big difference between Sex and Gender. Sex is all about the body, how body is shaped and how it functions. Male and female is the “Sex of brain”. Gender is the identification of a person’s inside the body (Salani et al., 2005). “Gender is a ubiquitous social construct that wields power over every individual in our society” (Burdge, 2007).

The term transgender is a general term applied to a variety of individuals, behaviors and groups involving tendencies to vary from the usual gender roles. Transgender is the state of one’s

gender identity (self-identification as woman, man, neither or both) which does not match one’s “assigned sex” (identification by others as male, female or intersex based upon the physical / genetic sex). These various types of transgender include transsexuals, transvestite, cross-dressers, tom boys, effeminate males, pan-gender and agender. “Transgender is an umbrella term applicable to a range of individuals who express their gender in non-traditional ways” (Burdge, 2007). The term transgender was then popularized with varying definitions by various transgender, transsexual and transvestite people and effeminate men (Bevan, 2014; Cauldwell, 1949 in Hausman, 1995) including Virginia Prince, who used this term in the issue of *Transvestia*, a national magazine for cross dressers in December 1969, she founded the magazine. By the mid-1970s, both terms (*trans-gender* and *trans-*

people) were in use as umbrella terms, and 'transgenderist' was used to describe people who wanted to live cross-gender without sex reassignment surgery (Elkins and King, 2006).

Transgender people tend to experience internal gender identities that do not match with their sex they were assigned at birth. This can cover a broad spectrum from cross-dressers (previously called transvestites but that term has fallen out of favor) who wear the clothing of a different gender to those who make surgical or hormonal changes to their bodies in order to match their gender identities (Meier, 2015).

Self image means how you perceive about yourself and individual's belief about him or herself, including the person's attributes (Baumeister, 1999; living, 2017). Traditionally, sex refers to a person's sexual anatomy, whereas gender refers to the qualities society considers masculine or feminine. So *Transgender* is "an umbrella term applicable to a range of individuals who express their gender in non-traditional ways" (Gagne, Tewksbury, & Mc Gaughley, 1997). Burdge (2007) took a next step by explaining "Sexual orientation refers to one's emotional and sexual attraction, whereas gender identity refers to one's sense of self as being female, male, or otherwise gendered (perhaps transgendered or not gendered at all)"

Transgender people have become the victim of mental stress, feelings of shame, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem because they had to deal with a variety of experiences affiliated to their gender identity. They were viewed as strangers and/or deviant persons in the society and treated negatively (Pattaraporn, Pranee, Paul O'Halloran & Rosediani, 2015). The core idea of all sociological perspectives strongly supports that social forces produce the specific thoughts and behaviors displayed by human beings rather than biological forces (Kimmel and Fracher, 1995; Longmore, 1998). Gender schema theory explains that children learn to adjust their behaviors according to the norms and set patterns of a particular culture (Lawrence Kohlberg, 1966).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Qualitative research method was used to get in-depth insights of different aspects regarding self-understanding and self-knowledge of transgender. Case studies were conducted for gathering detailed information as it is profitably used for gathering detailed information and enables the researcher to take stock of the existing situations. Fifteen case studies were taken through interview guide (tool of data collection) by using snowball sampling technique form non-probability sampling methods. The participants of this study were neither cross-dressers nor professional sex sellers but were effeminate males (males who like to adopt manifestation of the feminine traits regarding nature, behavior, mannerism rather than masculine traits). Major Themes were drawn from the case studies. Thematic analysis from the qualitative data analysis techniques was further used to analyze the gathered information. In the last stage, the interpretation and explanations of the themes were done for gaining major findings of the study.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION OF STUDY

Ethical contemplation is the most significant aspect of study. In this study researcher has also maintained ethical attention of research. An official letter was issued to researcher by Department of to show authenticity of research and also it was the sole duty of researcher to show his identity and introduction before data collection. Interviews were conducted from the respondents who consented.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Note: all the Names of the participants are fictitious suggested by themselves.

Personal Profile

As per the age of the participants, majority of them were from the age group of 35-45 years, some of them were of 45- and above whereas a small no. of the respondents were from the age group of 25-35. As per qualification of the participants, more than one fourth of the participants were under matric/ matric and

graduate for each. One fifth of the participants were Master degree holders whereas less than one fifth was intermediate and professional degree holders for each. As per the profession of the participants majority of them were job holders including teaching and tailoring fields, whereas some of them were businessmen and a small no. of the participants were self-employed. As per the marital status of the participants, almost majority of them were married whereas some of them were single.

Theme 1: Self-Concept

“Transgender is used to refer to persons who claim the term on the basis of feelings that their assigned gender role is incongruent with their sense of self.” As per the responses about the feelings of transgender about themselves all of them have responded that they have woman like feelings about themselves. *Munna*, a homeopathic doctor and a participant of this study, explained “I am a male (having all physical characteristics and capabilities of a male i.e. male organs and child bearing capacity) yet I have female characteristics into myself...into my inner self. I always had dreams of men and I always had dreams of being a wife of some good guy”. In addition, *Shamo*, a 42 years old transgender has explained a self-image in the words “From the very little age, I felt that I am not like other boys of my age but couldn’t understand that who am I? At the age of 15 or 16, I came to know that I have the answer of my question that I am a transgender, I am a woman occupied in a man’s body and in those days, I had all the answers i.e. why men attract me a lot??? Why not women attract me??? etc.”

Burdge (2007) took a next step by explaining “Sexual orientation refers to one’s emotional and sexual attraction, whereas gender identity refers to one’s sense of self as being female, male, or otherwise gendered (perhaps transgendered or not gendered at all).” Regarding the attraction feelings (romantic and sexual feelings) of transgenders towards other genders, all of them unanimously responded that men attract them for romantic and sexual feelings. *Mahi* elaborated his attraction feelings in these words, “Though it is by birth to be a transgender (*Zanana*) and I

never ever had any dream of a girl but always have dreams of men. Rather Boys always are the centre of my attraction and feelings”. *Sangeeta*, 47 years old transgender added in self-image with his statement: “from the very start, as back as I can recall my memory, I always had feelings towards men. I love men, the way they talk authoritatively, the way they demand their possession upon women, I love that. They attract me sexually; I love the smell of the body of a man.

As per the understanding of transgenders to differentiate themselves from other men, all of the participants pointed out that they have feminine feelings towards men, whereas an overwhelming majority among them pointed out mental differences, Shyness and Mannerism as addition. For example, *Saima*, a 38 years old transgender, supported these findings by saying that “I am a woman internally, I have a feminine soul. As I told you that we are different from other men because we all (Transgenders) are women inside but men may have feelings for women yet they are men. Their life style, their thinking, their feelings all is of men, not of women whereas we just have a male body in such society where nobody sees into our inside”. Another transgender *Paro* differentiated himself from other men with his views: “There were always restrictions and boundaries on me by my family as compare to other siblings whereas I asked about it to my parents. They said that “you are innocent and the people are not good so it’s better to be in home before our eyes.” I was growing up with a feminine spirit into my male body but neither anybody cared about me by my family nor they accepted and they didn’t want to accept me as I was figuring out myself a female.

Shamo told the researcher about how he was different from other men as “Now I left all the things ... no boyfriend I have... no transgender friend I have... no sexual relationships with anybody... and now I am trying to live a life of a good husband trying to provide all the needs of life to my wife. But what should I do with myself? It is harder for me to perform like a man all the time, from the dawn to dust, very much hard to build conjugal relations with my wife when a woman is also living into me. I have a woman

heart into my male body. In fact, I am also a woman even then I am fighting since last seven/eight years but sometimes it is out of my control to oppress my feminine emotions and then I only pray to Allah Almighty that bless me with peace of heart.”

When it was asked to the participants about how they feel themselves as women, all of them responded that they also had common and similar feminine feelings towards men as women have. In addition, all of them indicated further similarities between themselves and women as they are also fond of performing same feminine gender roles (washing cloths/cooking/ makeup) by following same patterns of mannerism and having shy-nature. As *Paro* wished “I have a soul that wishes for a husband who could love and care me... a soul that wants a home where I could cook food and washing clothes... a soul that prays to Allah Almighty to bless me with some children to whom I could impart endless love of a mother... but the reality is that it’s all a dream that can never be true...and it is also a reality that in spite of knowing all these we always wish for all these.”

Theme 2: Gender Role Playing

When it was asked from the participants that if they were given a chance to choose one out of two gender roles (masculine gender roles or feminine gender roles) , what type of gender roles would they preferred. All of them at once replied that they would prefer doing feminine gender roles rather than masculine gender roles. As *Munna* stated that “I am a very cowardice type of human. I became threatened even from a black cat in spite of having strong muscles. But I never ever quarrel with anybody. I love to read out the novels of a famous Urdu novelist Umaira Ahmed. I read almost all her novels. I am very much fond of having pets and gardening. I have two ducks and love them a lot. I like to spend as much time in my home as I can. I enjoy doing domestic chores like cooking in the kitchen, washing and ironing clothes etc. I don’t know how people say that they feel boring into their homes.”

Bindiya, 36 years old transgender, preferred feminine gender roles performing as he narrated

that “we talked among us as females, even calling each other with female name. Sometimes I dress myself as females do. I still care about myself so that I use lots of cosmetics to maintain my beauty and younger look for having smooth and soft skin for getting feminine soft touch. Don’t take it as a joke...its true.”

As per the comfortably and satisfaction with gender role playing, all of the participants responded for the female gender role playing. As *Anjo*, expressed that “though there is something which is not good and should be avoided yet those are not mention worthy here but I feel very original myself, all the expressions and feelings are original then, not artificial and no acting as a male in this regard. This is the reason that I think I could not change of my personality traits. I became exhausted while acting being a male, being a brother, being an uncle and being a husband. We need to return to our original sometimes so I do what is my original. I don’t know why but I know one thing that this face of man is not our original face.” *Mahi*, a 33 years old transgender, took this viewpoint further as he stated that “I want to do all the things which women do in the houses but I can’t do so as I am a male for my family ...a son for my mother ... a brother for my sisters and brothers, so I can’t. Due to the socio-cultural boundaries and as my religion grants no provision to a physical male to have SRS and /or convert his/her gender. It is considered a great sin. So it is nothing but a dream which have no interpretation.”

All of the participants about the practicing gender roles responded that they are practicing both gender roles as it is a struggle to balance their inner and outer self. They think that this is the appropriate way to live in the society for both (for own selves and for society). *Anjo*, 43 years old married transgender expressed his conflicting conjugal life with both gender roles performing as “I cannot bear a woman on my bed whereas I feels myself a woman (you are thinking that why I got marry then? So the answer is that the marriage is my family decision not mine and was forcefully imposed on me by my parents. So I had to accept). After marriage I always tried and still trying to make her life happy, fulfill her material needs but its beyond my capacity and/ or control

to love her openly as my brothers do with their wives by putting morsels of food into their mouths.” *Mano*, 32 years old transgender, further explained and simplified this viewpoint by giving his statement that “a transgender has to lead more than one life; one is of a male for his family, peers and society whereas the second life is of his inner to which he always has to either hide from the outer world. In this way, he has to perform the roles of both male and female throughout his life, as I am doing or trying to do all the things which my family and society want to do being a male and those things which my inner self ask me to do for the satisfaction of my soul (being a female gender I have).

DISCUSSION

It is concluded regarding the self-concept that all of the participants had feminine self-concept with the supporting view that they were women in the male bodies. The findings of the study strongly supported with the McCreary’s (1994) study who reported that all of the participants (perceive themselves as women), because they have woman like feelings about themselves.

Further Burdge (2007) explained “Sexual orientation refers to one’s emotional and sexual attraction, whereas gender identity refers to one’s sense of self as being female, male, or otherwise gendered (perhaps transgendered or not gendered at all).” Mountain Centre for Independent Living (2017) elaborated that “Self-image is how you perceive yourself”. Baumeister (1999) explained Self-concept in the words that “The individual’s belief about himself or herself, including the person’s attributes and who and what the self is”.

This study also found that all of the participants unanimously responded that men attract them for romantic and sexual feelings. The present study confirmed the findings of the prior studies of National Center for Transgender Equality (2009) reported “it is clear that there are people who are aware that they are transgender from their earliest memories. Many transgender people feel that their gender identity is an innate part of them, an integral part of who they were born to be.” Moreover, these findings are in line with the findings of studies of Keo-Meier, C. L.,

Herman, L. I., Reisner, S. L., Pardo, S.T., Sharp, C. & Babcock, J. C. (2015).

The participants had indicated similarities between themselves and women as they are also fond of performing same feminine gender roles (washing clothes/cooking/ makeup) by following same patterns of mannerism and having shy-nature. These findings are supported by Green (1987), who found that majority of young children were involved in the activities like dressing up their mothers’ clothes, putting on makeup and/or jewelry and playing with dolls. Furthermore, they use to play the roles of the opposite sex in their fantasy plays and nearly always assume a female role when playing house. The current study finds the same parameters with the results of Pattaraporn et al, 2015, regarding their confusion to balance their inner and outer self as they wanted to continue feminine roles but society forces them to indulge in masculine roles. This leads them towards psychological distress and maladaptation in life.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that femininity scores were an important factor in analyzing this population, as all of the participants had feminine self-concept with the supporting view that they were women in the male bodies. They showed their similarity and affiliation with women and differentiated from men with the responses that they had feminine feelings (including romantic and sexual feelings) towards men, shyness and mannerism. The present study concluded and strengthened the theme that all of the participants preferred to perform feminine gender roles as they felt comfortable with feminine gender role playing.

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