

Investigating Gaydom Turning Points in *Body 2 Body*

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies attempting to establish a genetic cause for homosexuality have been conducted since the early 1990s that have not been proven to be either valid or reliable. To date, the quest to establish the existence of a single chromosome in humans that would identify a person's homosexual identity seems futile as there are no scientific findings or DNA test results that have proven that such a third gender can be biologically determined. Therefore, on the premise that homosexuality, like race, is related to nurture rather than nature in the great nature versus nurture debate, this paper focuses on analysing the minds of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) individuals by investigating the turning points to gaydom of several characters in selected short stories from the collection in *Body 2 Body - A Malaysian Queer Anthology* by examining their feelings and decisions when they decide to adopt LGBT identity. This paper also discusses the processes that are involved in the transformation of the characters' sexual identity. In addition, with Freudian psychic zones in mind, this paper also tries to determine whether these characters' id, as opposed to their ego and superego, take control of their desires, or whether the tendency towards homosexuality exists naturally within them and is the reason they choose to become and remain part of the LGBT community.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the minds of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) characters through an analysis of their turning point towards gaydom. Three selected short stories taken from the book, *Body 2 Body - A Malaysian Queer Anthology*, edited by Jerome Kugan and

Pang Khee Theik, will be discussed further to highlight the processes involved in the characters' transition in their sexual identity. This discussion is preceded by a brief overview of the subject of homosexuality and Freudian theories related to it.

Homosexuality and Gaydom

In ancient Greece, homosexuality was considered a beautiful relationship between two men, and it was treated as the "highest and the most appreciated form of love" (Barnecka, Karp, & Lollike, p.6). However, other cultures hold a different position on the issue of same-sex preference depending on their beliefs and moral development. For instance, in the Islamic perspective of homosexuality, it is considered a disgrace and an "ugly sinful act, which Allah s.w.t forbids in all religions even in the most primitive ones," (Works of Al-Islam Group, n. d.). Judaism and Christianity also view homosexuality as unauthorised and immoral sexual behaviour, and, thus, the term 'sodomy' is viewed as an act against nature in the Old Testament (Pilecka, 1999, p.14). After the fall of the Roman Empire, it was believed that, when Christianity took over Europe, homosexuality was abolished, as it was a sinful activity in the eyes of many. However, the first well-known gay activist, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, decided to seek justice as he was a German jurist in Munich, and prevented the procedure of decriminalisation of homosexuality. Influenced by Ulrichs, many others also took up research into gender studies. For example, Richard Kraft-Ebing, a nineteenth-

century sexologist who was inspired by the work of Ulrichs, decided to explore sexual orientation. His research led him to conclude that "homosexuality is more of the brain's degeneration rather than one's own nature development" (Barnecka, Karp, & Lollike, p.7).

From then onwards, mental health professionals were focused on curing homosexuality through various kinds of experiments and methods in order to help patients change their sexual orientation. Many of the techniques caused physical pain and emotional trauma (Weinberg, 1983, pp.50-60). For example, one of the extreme aversion therapies that was taken and adapted from Nazi-Germany concentration camps to cure homosexuality was to be kept in a windowless room for three days filled with excrement and vomit. This nightmare left a deep scar on Peter Price's life as he was only 19 years old at the time when his mother had forced him to seek treatment for his homosexuality. During his treatment he was forced to listen to tapes insulting and abusing him as a queer person. Other than that, he was given a stack of gay magazines and crates of his favourite drink, Guinness, and had to listen to tapes of the doctors criticising his identity. He was also injected with multiple drugs, which resulted in nausea. Doctors refused to help the boy when he was seen to be ill and decided that he should just vomit over himself. Moreover, he was forced to look at semi-nude men and was given injections every hour to enforce an association between the nausea and the feelings he experienced at the

sight of male bodies. Besides being forced to listen to tapes and receive injections, Price was forced to endure electric treatments, which permanently damaged his remaining overall humanity. According to Price, the aversion therapy made him violently ill, and it practically destroyed his life (Barnicke, Karp, & Lollike, p.15). Such therapy sessions to cure homosexuality usually did result in making the person more ill. Indeed, this seemed to be the result of the belief of many that homosexuality was a mental disease and could be dismissed.

The components of homosexuality may be realised through various causes, which include behaviouristic, biological and psychodynamic origins. According to a columnist for 'Renew America,' in many of his experiences dealing with homoerotic culture, the pattern is mostly the same. He explained that most people were seduced into the same-sex experience, which was that their first sexual encounter and happened to be abusive, involving either same-sex rape or molestation. That first incident of abuse was repeated and eventually became habitual. Some would say it became them (Maguire, 2010). The observation of a homosexuality pattern is connected with the first sexual experience with a person of the same sex. Therefore, "behaviourists claimed that homosexuality is learned and would therefore be able to be unlearned" (Barnicke, Karp, & Lollike, p.10). At the same time, this is seen as more nurture- rather than nature-based, and it then develops into a homosexual identity.

Numerous studies have attempted to

establish a genetic cause for homosexuality that have not been proven to be valid or repeatable since the early 1990s. Hence, the biological determination of those who claim that they were "born this way" becomes inaccurate. This is due to the fact that there is "no evidence that has stood up to meticulous peer review pointing to a genetic etiology, although there are cases where some boys become more effeminate and some girls more masculine" (Satinover, 1996). However, psychologists viewed this pattern of queer culture to be incidental and not causative. Hence, there is no compelling evidence that can be used to expose the origin of homosexuality besides other environmental factors that influenced a person's learnt behaviour towards entering the 'gay kingdom' (Herek, 2014 p.6).

Nurture vs. Nature Instincts

Based on Freud's model of psychoanalysis, the human mind is divided into three separate units, which consists of the id, the ego and the superego. The id is the animal part of the psyche that contains man's primitive drives, and it only seeks the principle of pleasure, the main objectives of which are to achieve the satisfaction of its needs and desires. If the id is frustrated it tends to become aggressive. The superego contains more of the values and social morals that tell us what is right and wrong for us, and it influences us to behave well. When we do not, it punishes us with anxiety and guilt. On the other hand, the ego controls the greater mental processes for determining answers and problem-solving; thus, it also helps to

balance the id-superego dilemma by serving them with creative solutions that would satisfy the request of both constraints (as cited in Sammons, 2014). This was Freud's understanding of how the human self works, with the superego always attempting to control the mind to only focus on important issues that matter at the moment. All of the characters in the stories selected for this study face to some degree the struggle of the ego to make sense of the demands of the id.

Sigmund Freud, in developing this theory of his own, held that the human mind behaves like an iceberg stuck in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, static like a statue waiting for a big hit in order for it to dissolve into chunks of ice, which then melts into the water. This relates to the Freudian view that simple behaviour can have complex hidden causes. At the same time, he noted that we have to "think of our mind like an iceberg where most of it is hidden beneath the surface" (as cited in Sammons, 2014).

Many scientists and psychologists have tried to expand their research in terms of revealing genetic influence on sexual orientation. However, most research has not determined any origin of DNA related with how homosexuality develops. Most of the psychologists who resorted to a behaviourist point of view have explained that a person becomes homosexual if their first sexual experience had been with a person of the same sex. However, while having sexual experience with the same sex does not fix sexual orientation, it might be used as a stimulus to sexual arousal when masturbating. Therefore, a person may

replace the negative sexual experience into a positive reinforcement when masturbating (LeVay, 1996, pp.88-89).

On the other hand, an American study came out with rather conflicting findings when they found new evidence that could prove male homosexuality is influenced by genes. Dr. Michael Bailey, of Northwestern University, Illinois, who co-led the research, stated that being gay has nothing to do with choice. However, "this research has not yet been published and it is not completely determinative which other environmental factors could be involved" (as cited in Molloy, n. d.). This study has clearly proven that even though the main objective is to discover the existence of a gay chromosome in human DNA, actual findings, to date, have not been able to deliver a strong statement that homosexuality is the result of genetic predisposition. Hence, it would still seem that "Gaydom is a symptom of confused identity caught by most individuals who are lost with their own feelings and it is no doubt that people can recover from being homosexual" (Barnicke, Karp, & Lollike, p.31).

Turning Points of Characters' Id and Ego

Homosexuality encompasses a variety of "phenomena including same-sex intercourse, same-sex romantic and emotional bonding, same-sex desires and relationship created by certain shared culture communities. Furthermore, a report clarifies that most adults in the United States never made a conscious choice about their sexual orientation and that they have always felt

the same type of sexual attractions and desires” (Herek, 2014). This situation could be related to the unnamed character in the first selected short story “Good Job,” written by O Thiam Chin, who was forced by his father to take up a part-time job as a graphic designer at an old friend’s printing press company. The first day at work gave him an impression that the office environment was dry, and he disliked the idea of small talk with other colleagues. However, in this story the unnamed character narrates his own point of view regarding the curiosity he felt towards Uncle Ang, the director of the company:

I didn't see Uncle Ang that morning, but whenever he appeared later, he would either be looking over my shoulder, checking what I was doing or stepping out of the office, yelling behind him, at no-one in particular, anything please call me on my mobile. Sometimes he would stop and ask me how I was doing, whether I was doing okay. I said yes, I'm fine, it's great. (O. Thiam Chin, p.126)

As time goes by, the relationship between the unnamed character and Uncle Ang, the director of the company, bonds from all the work producing designs for book covers, brochures and flyers for their clients. In the beginning of the story, the unnamed character feels rather odd with the attention that was given to him, knowing that he is just an apprentice who has just started

working at the company. Nevertheless, after being praised by the director for being diligent, he feels very confident. Thus, he works extra hard at his tasks to gain approval from his boss. Based on the homosexual identity formation theory, “identity is acquired through a developmental process;” and it changes according to the interaction process that occurs between individuals and their environments” (Cass, 1979, p.219). In other words, “a person’s sense of self as gay evolves over time, and the environment influences half of a person’s self-concept toward being gay” (as cited in Thoma, 2005, p.5). This is partly true because, when the unnamed character is sexually molested for the first time by Uncle Ang, he feels confused that his “mind went haywire, pounding with the heady rush of blood and excitement, and then it suddenly shut down to a blank” (Chin p.129). This situation can be assimilated with how the Id mind works for the unnamed character when he feels confused over his first sexual encounter with the same sex. According to Freud, “humans know very little that goes on in the mind and that most of our thoughts, feelings and many of our memories are locked away in the unconscious” (as cited in Sammons, 2014).

I brought my fist to my face, biting it, absorbing the pain to my recesses, and the blood from the open wound leaked into my mouth. I tasted blood, and the raw, serrated edges of pleasure. In the secret depths of my being, I desired more. When his fingers were withdrawn, I uttered a soft, mournful 'no'...I started to cry,

though I wasn't sure whether it was from the intense pain or the violent pleasure. (p.131)

Thus, the second time he is molested by Uncle Ang, he obeys every instruction given and does not resist or fight back. Moreover, on some other days the unnamed character “would pass on a single overriding thought in his head: I want to be fucked again” (p.132). Freud believed that “the roots of our behaviours are driven mostly by our desires” and he considered sexual motives as the most important instinctual drives in which the ‘Id mind’ wants to be satisfied” (as cited in Sammons, 2014). Hence, the turning point for the unnamed character is highly influenced by his id mind, especially the sexual drives, which made him feel a certain kind of sexual attraction and desire to be drawn into having sex with his superior.

The Realisation of the Ego from the Id Mind

In the second selected short story entitled “Friends of Everyone,” written by Julya Oui, we are told the story of an “awful journey of being gay” (p.165) of the main character, named Rik. For many years, he has been gay and he thinks that it is natural for him to be a homosexual entering the life of gaydom; however, he expresses his opinion towards his new identity of being a straight guy as “people change” (Oui, p.165), and that “he was cured from his iniquitous and despicable way of life” (Oui, p.166). In the beginning of the story, Rik mentions that he considers himself to be a very extreme

queer person due to all of his past scandals and relationships with almost every guy he meets. Thus, after gaining confidence from joining a new faith in town called “Friends of Everyone; a non-denominational, non-religious, non-biased, non-political and all-embracing organisation run by Master Beh” (p.165), Rik feels as if “he was slain by the power of the celestial beings” when Master Beh cures him from his previous identity and he even realises that he was unconscious practically most of his lifetime when he was gay. This is similar to Freud’s description of the mind being trapped in ‘the unconscious,’ which is something that we are mostly unaware of and cannot become aware of. Rik realises that when he regains consciousness, he feels like he cannot accept his former lifestyle because when he reflects on the past by looking at the clothes he in his closet, he instantaneously feels disgusted with “the viridescent, the cerise and the shimmers now that he’d changed” (p.165). This shows that the main character is going through a process of realisation and embracing the conversion he makes; this process is called ‘repression.’ This is an impulse that has been put off and buried deep in one’s unconsciousness, making one forget reality and the truth, which makes the main character resent his fears of “being found out, exposed and ostracized” (p.166). Moreover, when Rik explains the main thing that he disliked most about being gay, it was his obsession with people discovering his sexual identity. This is one of the elements that characterise the unconscious mind, which Freud put

under 'bad' and 'worse' conditions, and of which humans are not aware. For example, the points that people repress in their unconscious minds are usually negative such as "fears, unacceptable sexual desires, irrational wishes, immoral urges, shameful and traumatic experiences along with our selfish needs" (as cited in Sammons, 2014).

The point of realisation and coming out from the repression of Rik's own mind would make him a person who managed to combat his own desires and, most importantly, stand up against his own id mind. Although the first experience of change brought him into stages of confusion, he feels torn between understanding what is best and what is good for him. Therefore, he believes that changing his identity from gay to straight is a good thing for him but, most probably, not the best experience worth mentioning. This is because, when Rik decides to change, he explains, "it was an abrupt decision, but that was how it worked, said the Master, nothing like instant abstinence" (p.166). This clearly verifies the point that relates to how an individual foresees his or her life in the future. For example, being a homosexual is a choice that people can choose or not, whereas, on the other hand, it relies heavily on the perceptions and attitudes of the individual in accepting the transition happening in their life. Based on Katz's elaboration on the functions of attitude, it serves multiple purposes such as knowledge function (cognitivism), adjustment or utilitarian function (behaviourism), ego-defensive function (Psychoanalytic) and/or value-

expressive function (social behaviourism). Katz also describes the ego defence function to be a defence mechanism (i.e. denial, repression, projection etc.) that people use to protect their self-concept from perceived threats. He relates ego defence to prejudice in that people unconsciously project their feelings of inferiority onto targeted minority groups and, as a result, feel superior (as cited in Landini, 2002, p.15). Therefore, Rik decides to project his feelings of repression and, in denial, shares the news, which he thinks is positive, with all his friends that he is no longer a homosexual. This action clearly proves that the character Rik is going through the process of realising that he has been forced into the transition of becoming a heterosexual person without knowing whether he really wants to move on.

He sat on the bed among his clothes and wondered if he was ever going to find love as a straight man. But that was beside the point. You don't worry about such things because such things don't really matter in the end; he thought to himself and fell back to bed reminiscing about his life. His new path would make a lot of people happy, especially his parents who had been praying very hard for a wholesome daughter-in-law who would be dexterous from bed to kitchen. It would also be easier now that he wouldn't have to hide his condition from some of his friends and colleagues. But then again, he remembered he was happy. (Oui, p.166)

From the above excerpt, we can analyse the main character's intention after having gone through the process of turning around in his sexual identity from being a homosexual to a heterosexual person. It is understood that his life as a gay man had definitely been a wonderful experience for him, except for the fact that when he returns to his consciousness, he questions his own self and wonders if being straight is the right choice for him. Initially, Rik believes that when he changes his sexual identity he would make people around him happy, and this somehow poses the question to his own soul as to whether being straight will make him happy. Most of the time he is thinking about whether he will survive being straight because he often "felt his past clinging to him like heartburn... When he didn't share their enthusiasm to explore the gender that made boys into men he questioned his sexuality for the first time and it frightened him. And now standing at the threshold of a new life, he felt that fear again" (p.169). Not all individuals "display consistency among their sexual feelings, behaviour and identity; some experience considerable fluidity in their sexuality throughout their lives" (Herek, 2014, p.1) Therefore, it is understood that being gay has always been Rik's best time of life. At the same time, after going through the process of healing his identity, he feels as if he needs support from close friends, but not everyone is supportive of his decision, which makes him become even more confused with his motives in changing his sexual identity. Consequently, the character Rik is awakened

by the rationale of his ego, which makes him realise the right path he should choose, but he is still heavily influenced by the fascinations of his desires.

The Id Mind vs. the Ego

The final analysis, of the selected short story entitled "Hafiz's Dilemma," written by Ann Lee, is an alluring story that brings us to understand what beauty means in a relationship without prejudging a person's sexual identity. The story begins with how Hafiz is upset with his (transsexual) girlfriend when he accidentally found one 'pubic hair' on the bed, knowing that it did not belong to either of them. Feeling curious, he suspected disloyalty, and it then "turn Hafiz's life upside down" (p.67).

Hafiz didn't have to look at it twice. He saw it being held up to the light in CSI by Grissom but he didn't really want to know its DNA or how crisp and thin it felt between the fingertips. As he hooked up from his book, there it was: curious fishhook, just lying there. Lying was right: proof at last, of deceit. But now that there was damning evidence, he was sad. Maybe they just rubbed skins. Bitch. How un-dig-ni-fied to find fucking out like this. (Ann Lee, p.67)

The above excerpt is taken from the beginning of the story, where the plot leads us to comprehend the conditions of what seems like a normal relationship

between couples who have had some misunderstanding argument to talking about how one pubic hair could make the boyfriend (Hafiz) furious. The fact that he finds a strand of hair, which anybody could overlook, and that its presence clearly upsets him, shows that this relationship is serious, and Hafiz is definitely concerned about his girl. However his girlfriend is not biologically female; “Hafiz was no lover of women as he liked softness, curves, a strength and elegance to things. But he didn’t generally attribute these to women, at least not the biologically born, surgically or sociologically constructed ones he knew” (p.68). According to Cass’ theory individual choice is important in a person’s homosexual identity development (Thoma, 2005, p.6). It is important to know that, in relating with Hafiz’s situation, we have to acknowledge, “sexual orientation is experienced in complex and variable ways, which are undoubtedly influenced by both biological and societal factors” (Shagor, 2014). Hence, the turning point for Hafiz comes from both experiences of biological and societal factors. This homosexual momentum comes from his young and wild habits where he would “love to look at anyone and imagine what they are like in bed” (p.69). He took this habit to a higher level where he channelled out his desires by watching “porn non-stop for days until he was so sure of each genre and his mind was totally disengaged” (p.69). Relating back to the previous theory of how a person becomes homosexual, with the first sexual experience having been with a

person of the same sex, provides support in explaining Hafiz’s dilemma of verifying his own sexual orientation. Next is the part that indicates the individual’s sexual identity, which depends on the first sexual encounter where the individual goes through physical touch with another person, regardless of gender. Even though the sexual experience does not fix a person’s sexual orientation, in relation to Hafiz’s situation, his first sex was with someone of his own gender; although it was a wonderful and warm experience, he clearly understood the immorality of his actions. However, this does not stop him from moving forward into more deeply exploring his sexual desires because “like a uniform, he had worn his shame during the day and hung it up at night when he went to sleep” (p.69). Although he understood humiliation, he transformed it into positive reinforcement when he falls in love with someone of the same sex, and the innocence of that time almost undoes him. The first sexual experience makes him feel “as if all his clothing had been removed by the boy though each piece had left its imprint on his skin” (p.69).

In addition, the innocence of Hafiz’s youth influences his sexual preference, and it evolves through time, which makes him believe that he is not straight, according to his experiences of the past involving relationships with people of the same gender. This pattern clearly shows that Hafiz has replaced negative sexual discernment as a positive aspect in his life. Thus, he learns to accept that he “just grew to enjoy sex without fear” (p.70); without fear of being

judged by society and ostracised by others. This results in another resolution, where the character Hafiz in this story gets involved in an atrocious episode of eccentric affairs with men previously in his life, and later grows to be very fond of sex.

I really liked the sex we had. When we first started, it was like climbing over and under fences in order to cut the wire that framed them... Hafiz stood for a moment, staring after her, listening for the start of the car. Then he went back to reading, having assured himself he was still, after everyone, and in spite of everything, very much loved. (p.75)

This shows that Hafiz is following his id mind and the extreme sexual desires he devours while being with the same gender. Although he admires beauty and elegance that are usually associated with the essence of womanliness, because he likes men, he transposes these features onto the man who is now his girlfriend. As Freud mentioned, the id mind is always the animal part of the human psyche, and its main function is to be satisfied with selfish needs, especially sexual desires; this seems to suggest that Hafiz is trapped in his own psyche. At the same time, being in a relationship where he is sexually happy makes him believe that he is very much in love; this is a sign that his id mind is severely controlling the emotions and sanity of his ego.

CONCLUSION

Psychoanalytical theory works to analyse the individual's behaviour in connection with the id, ego and superego. The stories analysed here show that the individual characters' behaviour depends on personal lust; this signifies that the character is obeying his or her id mind, and that the turning point of becoming an LGBT person is mainly to fulfil his or her own desires. On the other hand, if the characters' are being rational about their action in becoming an LGBT person, it is said that they are obeying their ego because that is a self-aware reaction of the individual character. Also, it makes the character feel complete and happy because it is what they believe to be real. On the other hand, if the character is proven to be feeling misled or confused with his or her own morality, it signifies their guilt feelings over what the superego is telling them when they choose to be an LGBT person. In conclusion, all three analyses of the short stories taken from the anthology indicate that the power of the id mind controls the self-realisation of the individual characters towards the functions of understanding their own personalities as LGBT persons. All of the characters discussed here go through physical experiences with the same gender, and somehow, they mould their character into becoming homosexual beings. This probably has to do with the individual's own strength to combat what the id mind desires most by choosing to look at the realistic function of the situation and not to be confused by temporary happiness.

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