

Gender Identity of Androgynous Female: A Perspective of Intersubjectivity

[Szu-Yin Li, Shyh-Nan Liou]

Abstract—The androgynous females in this research are defined as ‘an individual who not only identify herself a non-typical female, owning femininity and more masculinity than most of female in current society, but also feeling unaccommodated with current gender categories, pursuing a her own identity actively.’

First, participants are interviewed about androgynous identities and life experiences, and researcher’s participation of becoming an androgynous female personally helps to gain more insights. Secondly, the interview contents are analyzed based on the approach of intersubjectivity, including three types of influences on participants. Type 1: How do androgynous females think most people’s perceptive to a typical woman? This responds can manifest how social norm expect to a typical female. Type 2: How do androgynous female think most people’s perceptive to an androgynous female? The responds show that androgynous females’ difficulties and dilemmas in daily life from their close family and society. Type 3: How do androgynous female think androgynous females’ perceptive to an androgynous female? The answers manifest androgynous females’ identities actively, and what they expect to themselves.

Results show that androgynous females still modify their behaviors unconsciously to make themselves accepted in society. They often negotiate themselves with social norm, striking a balance between what they want to be and what society expect them to be. Thus, consumption dilemma and conflict happened in their life experiences, which can manifest the ideology of beauty in society. The meaning of beauty is strongly linked with femininity, which means ‘good’ unconsciously, and it finally becomes an important standard of evaluating women, which means those who can get married are better. Finally, androgynous female is a challenge of not only female stereotype but also androgynous female stereotype are concluded. Those differences between them and others are the important factors to construct their identities. Even though they are often struggle with the social norm, it is the main way they are not obedient to the hegemony, trying to against social norm actively and personally.

The current research is helpful for understanding androgynous females and gender culture, expanding more possibilities of gender concept, applying reflections to improve a more gender-friendly environment.

Keywords— *androgynous female, intersubjectivity, femininity, masculinity, gender identity*

Szu-Yin Li/
Institute of Creative Industries Design/ National Cheng Kung University
Taiwan

Shyh-nan Liou
Institute of Creative Industries Design/ National Cheng Kung University
Taiwan

I. Introduction

There is a new female image appears in mass media in Taiwan - androgynous female, getting attention not only because of the champion of competitions, but also her non-typical female style and looks. People do not compliment her beauty like they usually do for female celebrity, but describe her with word ‘special,’ ‘owning strongly unique personality,’ or even ‘handsome’ that we usually describe for male. Androgynous female avoids dressing up in typical female clothes, not acting elegantly with long hair, but show masculinity with masculine short hair style, blurring her sexual characteristics by wearing male clothes, which are similar to what men do reversely. Significantly non-typical appearance contributes their popularity, making them a new favorite of mass media and advertisers as well as criticism. Their sexual orientation is also doubt to be homosexuals on account of their butch-like appearance and manners, facing social rejection and criticism implicitly and explicitly.

Androgynous females evoke my interest and curiosity to explore why and how they perform in that way. Johnson (2008) argues that people tend to choose the path of least resistance in socialization, and I notice that I was always a ward to present my femininity. I was born a girl, playing Barbie, dressing up girly with pink stuff and skirts, learning how to act gracefully since my childhood, but they are in the opposite way. Also, since androgynous female got more not only on media, but also in daily life. I start thinking why they are so different from me? Or I should ask ‘why am I so different from them?’

II. Literature Review

A. What is androgyny?

This non-typical female is called androgyny. The concept of androgyny was first asserted by Rossi in 1964, which refer those who has both traditional female and male characteristics. In 1974, Bem describes the development of a new sex-role inventory that treats masculinity and femininity as two independent dimensions, for those who who have high scores on both masculinity and femininity are labeled androgynous. However, the androgynous female in this essay are define as ‘an individual who not only identify herself a non-typical female, owning femininity as well as more masculine characteristics than most of female in current society, but also feeling unaccommodated with current gender categories, trying pursuing a new sex identity actively.’

Female with masculinity is often asserted in gender studies about lesbian or transgender in Taiwan (Wu, 2011), or

mention their identification between gender categories (Cromwell, 1999; Hale, 1998; Rubin, 2006). Yeh (2011) explores the masculine females' gender identities of butch lesbian and transgender in Taiwan and their everyday life, ignoring others who are bisexual and heterosexual. However, 'masculine female' reflects that only male supposed to be masculine, but female does not so that it is added masculine to describe them. Therefore, androgynous is need more to better describe what they really are, and not refer to specific sexual orientation.

B. Identity and difference from others

Conceptualization of culture identity presents it as 'a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being"' (Hall, 1990). He emphasize that identity is not fixed in the rigidity of binary opposition, and identity is deferred and slippage. Identity is the problem of sameness and therefore of intersubjectivity (Woodward, 1997). To those female who identify themselves as androgyny, what concept's role count as 'the same' and 'as different' need to be discuss. Androgyny female identity relies on something outside themselves, distinguished by who or what is not androgynous. In other words, identity is marked by difference, through it is the difference that troubling themselves.

III. Methodology

The interviews were conducted to ask their life process of becoming an androgynous female, and they are asked to bring the photos taken before and to explain them. Moreover, during the the period of conducting research, I have trying to transform myself in to androgynous female since May, 2013 in order to empathize how they feel, what challenges they meet and what the interaction between them and other people around them.

A. Intersubjectivity Approach

Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, & Wan,(2010) propose the *intersubjective culture approach* as a new approach to understanding the role that culture plays in human behavior, which are distinct from personal values and beliefs, mediate the effect of the ecology on individuals' responses and adaptations. Subjectivity includes our sense of self, which involving conscious and unconscious as well as emotions, constituting 'who we are' and the position within culture. The subjects of this study must invest themselves in androgynous female identity, taking up as individuals who position themselves, and the contradiction and changes are implied. What individuals see inside themselves is not the only this article concern, but what the individuals see when looking outward at their social environments. Secondly, intersubjective perceptions explain cultural behaviors even when they are dissociated from personal values, which means people could act on their shared perceptions instead of their own values (Chiu et al., 2010). Every person is influenced by how they think the way others' think, using intersubjective knowledge as behavior guides because it serves important epistemic, communication, and identity functions. Thus, this

methodology would be helpful to adopt to examine how the social norm shape the self -concept of our target groups.

I. TABLE ANALYSIS FROM PERSPECTIVE OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Type	Analysis from perspective of intersubjectivity	
	Others	Perspective to
1	<u>Most people</u> : typical women, typical men, mass media (Social Norms)	What a <u>typical woman</u> is
2	<u>Most people</u> (Social Norms)	What an <u>Androgynous female</u> is
3	<u>Another</u> Androgynous female	What an <u>Androgynous female</u> is

According to self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), the process of self-categorization is an important period of constructing social identity, which is in turn based on perceived group differences. When individuals assign a higher priority to one in-group identity over another, they may attribute to themselves prototypic characteristics that uniquely define the more strongly identified in-group in contrast to the other (Wan et al., 2007). In this study, androgynous female and her others both within group and between groups will be discussed. How they think other's impression has great influence on their identities and practices. The contents of interviews will be analyzed based on three categories: (1) How do androgynous female think most people's perceptive to a typical woman? (2) How do androgynous female think most people's perceptive to an androgynous female? (3) How do androgynous female think androgynous females' perceptive to an androgynous female? The degree of others' perspectives influence on individuals increase from type 1 to type 3, and type 3 has the strongest influence.

IV. Results

The content of interview is categorized into three types, and the ideology behind the narratives will be explained. Also, my personal experiments will be added to make the life experience more concrete.

A. Type 1: How do androgynous female think most people's perceptive to a typical woman?

The answers to this question 'what do you think most people's perspective of an typical female?' is easy to image, and those are some common traits of femininity, including natural, positive, and negative adjectives, such like long hair, dress- loving, makeup wearing, skinny, warm-hearted, gentle, well-mannered, weak, dependent, cowardly and so on. The image about female whom androgynous female mentioned is Lin Chi-ling, Sui Tang, Gwei Lun-Mei, Yang Cheng Lin.

Those celebrities’ image constructed what traits a girl should have , like pretty, skinny, long hair, elegant, short hair but cute, reserved and so on. These differences make them identify what is androgynous female and who is not.

In my cases, my cousin wanted to enlighten and convince me to be a girly and soft female, so that I can have some ‘good’ male chaser and get married finally like him to have a wonderful family. There is very critical to mention an ideology that people think those who can get married and build a family are better and more successful. Especially for the female who didn’t get married, they are unable to get married because they are not good enough, or not beautiful enough due to not feminine enough precisely to say.

However, what really worths mentioning is the manner of speaking they talk about this characteristics. The tone is full with sneer and disagreement no matter the trait is positive or , which seems to present the interviewer just ask a simple question that is so easy to answer in common sense.

I think that all negative word can be used to describe women like weak, cowardly.....whatever negative word can be used. People tend to build men as an independent, better, outstanding hero person, but none is telling a girl to be a ‘heroine.’ I don’t mean girl is that negative but those negative traits are constructed connecting with female. (Z, 24)

The marketing strategy in the current society often take gender as an important demographic variables of target customer segment. Marketers use mass media to manipulate gender distinguished so that they can sell products more precisely to specific target customers. For example, the clothing and accessories are design differently, either masculine for men or feminine for women. This manipulation reinforce stereotype of being a woman or man, and the concept of beauty is tightly connected with femininity, and desired by men are. Those who without imperfection on face, skinning, and femininity are constructed as common ideology of beauty, which is ‘better’ girl that make men desire. Therefor, those girls who do not want to dress up in a feminine way face difficulties and dilemma of consumption, leading androgynous female to be an unsatisfied consumer.

It’s really hard for me to buy a jeans! Once I wanna buy a jean, but all the jeans for girl are tight-fitting. It’s too over! I can’t believe it! It’s a ‘department store,’ how could it sell all jeans are only tight-fitting design without any other pieces of comfortable material quality? (Tzu,30)

Typical female celebrities			
Lin Chi-ling	Sui Tang	Yang Cheng Lin	Gwei Lun-Mei
			

II. TABLE 2 TYPICAL FEMALE CELEBRITIES MENTIONED

Resource: provided by participates from google pictures

1) Consumption dilemma

During the process, it is pretty hard to buy a product, especially clothing and accessories which is not gender distinguished. What’s worse, I cannot even find a reference group, such as model on magazine. There are a lot of models on magazine and actress from movie, showing how to be a ‘beautiful’ woman, but there is nothing can show people how to be an androgynous female. Then, the androgynous female from subculture media are almost butch, like lesbian magazine, but I don’t mean to present like a lesbian. Finally, the compromised way is to see some Japanese male and Korean male media even though I still feel not that appropriate due to the biological differences between sexes. The other way I noticed is some luxury international brand like Gucci, AX, CK, some female models in the advertisements from which are androgynous, but the price can easily make me think that was just illusion and unreal fashion.

Worse thing is during the promotion, my confidence and proud as an androgynous female was collapsed in shopping mall and in front of the advertisements. I started confusing if I was wrong to be an androgynous female and what I really want to be. All the clothing for females emphasize ‘beauty,’ or ‘feminine beauty’ more precisely to said. All the shops, like Zara, Mango, presents that they are design for fashion woman. Although there were not many fashion models advertisements exhibited in shop, the atmosphere still let customers know this place is for someone femininely beautiful. For example, skinning, dark color, body-shape emphasized, and so on. I strongly feeling unaccommodated, looking at myself in the mirror, fat and ugly. What worse, I though the man I like must not like me due to my ugliness as well as not femininity, so I started thinking that if I were the me before, I will look better and he probably will like me or pay more attention on me.

How ironic it is that so call beauty and fashion make a girl feeling ugly and less confident! Those girly and feminine commercial products is a filter, shaping what a standard and typical beautiful girl should be, and the others who do not fit the filter are not standard female.

Typical female celebrities			
Lin Chi-ling	Sui Tang	Yang Cheng Lin	Gwei Lun-Mei

B. Type2: How do androgynous female think most people's perceptive to an androgynous female?

Type 2 is what androgynous females perceive most people (social norm) perspective to what an androgynous female is, and it has a second most powerful impact on androgynous female. In this part, participants tend to answer the question base on the comparison with typical female, they use the adjective begin with 'not.' For instance, most people think androgynous females are 'looks not typical, not wearing skirts, not detailed, not gentle, not well-mannered, not that weak like typical women and so on. Also, they disappointed that most people only judged by appearance, not concerning about personality and thoughts. These words like 'not' gentle, 'not' detailed, 'not' skirt-wearing' are frequently used in their narrative of this question.

1) Being labelled

Moreover, all androgynous females interviewees encounter the situation of doubting to be lesbian, and almost all of them claim that androgyny is not essential refer to specific sexuality, even though most people think androgyny is related to homosexual.

Most people cannot tell the difference between who is just an androgynous female and who is really a butch, they just see them as same. (Robin)

What cannot be denied is that there are a few stores are opened to target 'butch' to solve their clothing problem as a new market target, but it is hard to say that can be a bright spots to attract most butches or androgynous females. The androgynous females who identify themselves as butch they are not used to buy in this specific shop. 'The products in that kind of shop are really expensive but nothing special worth that price.' Robin (butch, 27) said. Apart from economic problem, the other reason might be homophobia. For those who tend to buy butch clothing and men wearings, they tend to show their sexuality, declaring they belong to subculture — lesbians. However, this make some of androgynous females more anxious.

I'm so easy to looks like a man, so I can't really wear male clothing, or people will take me as a butch. After being labelled as a butch, they will have preconceptions on you, this is the reason why I think buying a clothing is quite difficult for me. I am really incapable of this. (Ven, 30)

I don't want to be look like a man, but if I tie my hair it makes me look so manly, that's so suck! Because it (looks manly) will make people feeling distant from you, and also label you as a butch. I don't like that! Sometime people may ask me 'are you a butch?' I would respond 'Am I? Did I say that I am a butch before?' (Bao, 27)

I pursuit a manly look, because I concern my girlfriend's feeling. I hope that we can be treat like heterosexual couple rather than lesbian couple. (Robin)

Through the content from interview, we can know the identities of being an androgynous female is not necessary consistent within group. In my case, the transformation of being an androgynous female make me more clear about how my family's attitude change. Compared with friends, family is tend to say what they think directly without concerning manners, and they usually said rudely with a positive excuse: 'what I say is to make you better.'

My mother was angry about my change, including my male hairstyle, and androgynous dressing style. In my 24 birthday, I wanted to buy a male kind watch, and she tried to stop me but she knew she could not, because I paid with my own money. Moreover, my mother started doubting my sexuality, and she thought that I need to see a doctor if I am a lesbian. She changed her attitude to my female friends who visited me, not as passionate as before. Once she can help begging me not to be an androgynous female anymore, and please transfer back to what I originally was. I can feel my mother's homophobia, helpless, nothing she can do to change me back as well as the full disappointment.

At the beginning, I was angry about what she criticize me ugly, like looking like a male, unable to get married in the future. Not until one day we were gossiping that I knew that that she was scold herself when she thought I was awful. She gossiped that one of her female employee who hasn't married until 40 years old, and that's mainly her mother's fault, because that female employees' mother miss a chance to find a good husband for her daughter when she was still young. Likewise, whenever she thinks I was too ugly to find a good husband, looking like a butch whom is not recognized as a normal person, she unconsciously think that is her responsibility, which means that is her fault if I am a lesbian due to her failure raising. Just like some homosexuals' mother, and some criminals' mothers, they have strong sense of guilty. I finally realize that 'mother' is also a victim of hegemony, who need to take over whole pressure and responsibility of teaching and raising good and normal children.

The ideology behind these narrative is that androgynous female exists in comparison with the exist of typical female, describing whom with 'not- good characteristics' means androgynous female are 'worse than' and 'infer to' typical female. Furthermore, the ideology of 'androgynous female are equal to butch' even make their situation worse, homosexual are unconsciously connected to androgynous female, which are thought as 'not normal' or 'unfortunate' in a homophobia society, representing our society try to categorized people into only two groups based on sexualities: heterosexual and homosexual, and those who are not belong to these binary categories are ignored, such as bisexual, pansexual, transgender, and any possible sexuality. Thus, we can know

that the second ideology is ‘people are either heterosexual or homosexual.’

C. Type 3: How do androgynous female think androgynous females’ perceptive to an androgynous female?

How and what kind of traits androgynous females describe androgynous females can be categorized into these dimension: appearance, personality, manners, behavior, and attitude.

In comparison with type 2, the traits they mention are similar but the ways how they describe are different, and more positive traits are mentioned than before. They tend to use the more positive adjective words like decisive, independent, strong personality, instead of the words begin with ‘not-.’ For example, ‘looks natural’ replaces ‘non-typical female’, straightforward and open-minded rather than ‘not detailed,’ ‘pants-loving’ replacing ‘not wearing dress.’ This way of narratives show more subjective and active.

Participants’ most frequent answer to question ‘why are you androgynous?’ is ‘*I am just born this way.*’ ‘*There is nothing about becoming*’ said HoHo, when I ask her to describe her process of becoming an androgynous female.

I am a pretty lucky person. I think my personality is positive because my parents didn’t oppress me to be so called ‘outstanding or normal’ person. I know many homosexual people cannot come out because their family are homophobia, and also people think homosexual people must come from a broken family, but it’s totally opposite in my case. (HoHo)

In my cases, I found out the best thing to be an androgynous female is freedom, getting rids of the boundaries of beauty What I change to be an androgynous female is not only appearance, but also manners. I gave up most of my cosmetics that make my skin more health, saving more time; giving up high heels make me walk faster and more comfortable even though not that elegant; forgetting all the elegant manner a pretty girl should behave, I can laugh whenever I want, and enjoy more outdoor activities which I used to think make me sweat and dirty. It is freedom that make me feel like ‘being a human,’ just like how society treat a normal man. This made me more confident than before, even though I was no longer be compliment as a beautiful girl.

Continuous Negotiation: ugly or not ugly?

If we ask androgynous female ‘do you mind others’ perspective on you?’ the answer is probably no, they would say they are always doing themselves, but when they mention about the situation related to ‘being feminine,’ the contents change. Red is an androgynous female who is getting marry.

When I was fitting the wedding dress, my designer suggests me to try low-cut one, or full of lace decorated with flowers one. I felt embarrassed not only due to it’s too bare, but also I haven’t dress like

that before that will make other people felt weird and ugly. (Red)

What participants think others’ perspective on them have an influence on them, shaping what they should do and should not do. Actually, the point is not whether she looks pretty or not on that low-cut dress, but what she think others’ sense of beauty. She thinks that other’s perspective of an androgynous female wearing a girly dress is ugly (ideology of beauty), and she identify herself an androgynous female, so she think she is ugly in a girly dress. Similarly, another participants also ask me ‘How could you image I wear girly clothing? That will be disgusting. (Robin, Z, Jane)’ manifest their understanding of others’ sense of beauty. This ideology shaping their behavior unconsciously, and make them unaccommodated with social norm.

In my androgyny becoming cases, it was not a decision that I can make without hesitation, taking me around one month to determine to cut my long hair. The main reason why I hesitated very much is ‘beauty.’ During my growing process, I have dreamed to be a beautiful and sexy woman, and long hair is one of the important conditions to reach this goal. A process of negotiation with myself started, I tried to convince myself with many reasonable reasons, like the weather is very hot and humid in Taiwan, helpful for research, trying something new will be better, so and so. However, beauty means ‘to be desired,’ no matter in heterosexual or homosexual relationship, the girl with long hair are always more popular than those with short hair, because long hair is more related to femininity as well as beauty.

Also, similar situation happened when I fitted the clothing, I considered two conditions whether I buy it or not. One is ‘will he like me in this way?’ and the other is ‘is it too feminine?’ However, the most contradictory is that ‘what kind of girl I think he likes’ is different from ‘what I want to be.’ I think that most of men desire femininely beautiful women whom he desired too, but I expect myself to be an androgynous female, many people think whom is more masculine, less beautiful as well. In fact, what influenced me is not what the guy I like think, because I do not know what he think exactly, but what I think most people’s (social norm) perspective of a woman whom will be desired. Above all, we can see that individual’s behavior is not only influenced by personal will, through the approach of intersubjectivity, we know how the ideology makes impact on individuals.

IV. Conclusion

Even though type 1 has the least powerful impact on androgynous female, or ‘what androgynous females perceive most people’s (social norm) perspective to what a female is,’ it is the important part of constructing their identity, because the identity is the problem of sameness and differences (Woodward, 1997). Compared with the people who is far different from androgynous females, their identity could be built.

A. Ideology of Beauty

The meaning of beauty connected with femininity, and being desired by men in heterosexual relationship so that being able to get married, which means someone are good enough. However, the standard of beauty is unitary and monotone: skinning, big breast, thin waist, long hair as well as manners like elegant, obedient. Mass media shapes who are beautiful without any imperfection in this way, and the commercial product is like an invisible filter in reality, filtering those who can fit are typical female and the rest of who can not fit are worse female—androgynous. In other words, females can not really decide what they want to look like, due to the ideology of beauty, female can only passively cater to the concept of beauty in social norm.

Ultimately, beauty has become a very important concept, especially a standard to evaluate women. Others judgements of beauty become what a female take to heart rather than any accomplishments like wisdom or talent. This standard of beauty categorizes women into two groups, for those whom are feminine and beautiful are normal, better, and capable to get married, but for those whom are androgynous are unconsciously thought as not beautiful, worse, incapable to get married as well as abnormal as a result of being butches.

B. Ideology of 'either heterosexual or homosexual'

All the participants have the same experiences of being labelled as a butch, no matter what sexualities they are. Who is not looks like typical could be labelled differently as a lesbian, which represent that our society are categorized by sexuality into two groups: heterosexual and homosexual, and the people are not belong to these binary categories are ignored, such as bisexual, pansexual, transgender, and any possible sexuality.

Thus, for those who already and eager to in heterosexual relationships (not necessary heterosexual), they need to keep negotiating themselves with their own femininities and masculinities, struggling between what they want to be and what they think other's perspective of a girl desired by men. For those who want to or already in homosexual relationships (not necessary homosexual), they are being labelled as specific abnormal people.

C. Androgyny as a gender identity.

In this research, many traits are discussed, especially those feminine traits represent the traditional expectation toward women, those masculine traits representing more powerful, enterprising modern expectation toward people, especially toward men. Those different traits may arise their awareness of being special. Furthermore, with the development of gender concept, they mention they are not the only androgynous person in society, and this make themselves more confident to strengthen their identity of androgynous female.

Even though they want to resist the social norm, they need to use the way social norm accept, and this is what they think other's perception make impact on them, perspective of

intersubjectivity. Therefore, our social norm have a collective image on androgynous female, like not long hair, not detail, not elegant and so on.

Ideologically, androgynous females are infer due to the ideology of beauty and sexuality. Their exist against the traditional hegemony, which not only make them struggled and unaccommodated in current society, but also construct their senses of selves, or identities of androgynous females. 'I am just born this way,' 'there is nothing about becoming' is what they answer most frequently when I ask them why they are so androgynous during their process of becoming an androgynous female. Thus, we conclude: Androgynous female's identity is a female who match for masculinity and become an active identity to against social norm.

D. Contribution

Explore what they had been through, including their growth process, particular the transition points of life, to make people understand more about androgynous females. We can arouse peoples' sympathy by telling the stories about their struggling which are ignored by the majority who are accepted by social norm, and return of repressed. I believe this study is warm-hearted now that understanding can decrease discrimination and teaching people learn to respect others who are different from social norms, which is what a homophobia society needs.

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About Author (s):



Szu-Yin LI
Master degree student from Institute of
Creative Industries Design, National Cheng
Kung University.
Under Liou's supervision in developing
thesis.



Shyh-Nan Liou
Associate Professor from Institute of
Creative Industries Design, National Cheng
Kung University