

Inner Conflicts in Calliope's Intersexuality in Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

**Background of the Study**

A 14-year-old boy, who previously had a surgery to close his vagina and lower down one of his testes, returned to Kariadi Hospital in Semarang for his breasts started growing and hurting whenever he was pushed on the chest. He and his mother felt ashamed because the child was often called *mbah banci* (sissy grandma), and for that reason they wanted him to be “normal”, according to Wieringa (2014, p. 169). She mentions further that the boy was classified as male on the day he was born, but years later feminization started to set in.

Lynn Edward Harris, born with ambiguous genitalia, was identified female on the day she was born. When she reached puberty, she grew facial hair, her voice became heavy, and she did not menstruate. She continued to live as female by wearing women's clothing and a padded bra to look feminine. She did it so well that she won a local beauty pageant, the Costa Mesa Junior Miss Pageant in 1968 (“Harris (Lynn Edward) papers,” n.d.).

From the above factual examples, we know that there are people with such conditions. The stories above are only two out of hundreds of people with intersexuality.

Intersex Fact Sheet from [www.unfe.org](http://www.unfe.org) defines:

Intersex people are born with sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads and chromosome patterns) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies.

Intersex is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. In some cases, intersex traits are visible at birth while in others, they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal intersex variations may not be physically apparent at all. ("Intersex," n.d., p. 1)

Medically, intersex people have conditions ranging from:

Clitoromegaly (a large clitoris which generally as larger than .09cm; micropenis (a penis smaller than .25cm); partially fused labia/scrotum; hypospadias (the urethra opens on the phallus or perineum, not at the tip); vaginal agenesis (absent or short vagina and absent, misshapen, or small uterus); gonadal agenesis (failure of gonadal development); gonadal dysgenesis (abnormally formed gonads, partially or completely non functioning); sex chromosome mosaicism (chromosomes vary throughout the body cell by cell); to "true hermaphroditism", having either one ovary or one testis or having one or two ovotestes (gonads that contain both ovarian and testicular tissue). (Kelly, 2007, p. 1)

To most people, biological sex<sup>1</sup> and gender<sup>2</sup> are congruous. Intersex people, if and when they are anatomically ambiguous, are boxed in to the one closest to what is visible and/or expected. In some cases, the expected congruity between biological sex and gender, in the later time, turns out to be mistaken, since the anatomy changes as the infant grows up. Putting them into fixed categories may not what intersex people want.

It has been shown that biologically human sexuality is diverse. We humans are not only female or male, but some of us are neither or both. It seems to be frightening for us human to admit that there are shades of gray in sexuality. This is where intersexuality is part of the fluidity of human sexuality. If we go further, SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression) will reconfirm that the spectrum of human sexuality is limitless.

[www.unfe.org](http://www.unfe.org) (United Nations Free and Equal), a United Nations campaign for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality, in its UN Fact Sheets, defines SOGIE as follows:

Sexual orientation refers to a person's physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction towards other people. [...] Gay men and lesbian women are attracted to individuals of the same sex as themselves. Heterosexual [...] are attracted to individuals of a different sex from themselves. Bisexual people

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<sup>1</sup> A person's biological status. Typically categorized as male and female.

<sup>2</sup> The attitude, feelings, and behavior that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex.

may be attracted to individuals of the same or different sex. Sexual orientation is not related to gender identity.

Gender identity reflects a deeply felt and experienced sense of one's own gender. A person's gender identity is typically consistent with the sex assigned to them at birth. For transgender people, there is an inconsistency between their sense of their own gender and the sex they were assigned at birth. In some cases, their appearance and mannerisms and other outwards characteristics may conflict with society's expectations of gender-normative behavior. ("LGBT Rights: Frequently Asked Questions," n.d., p. 1)

And last:

Gender expression refers to the "[...] way in which a person acts to communicate gender within a given culture; for example, in terms of clothing, communication patterns and interests. A person's gender expression may or may not be consistent with socially prescribed gender roles, and may or may not reflect his or her gender identity" (American Psychological Association, 2008, p. 28). ("Definition of terms: Sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation," 2011)

In lay people's mind, biological sex and gender is one thing. The story of Alter Hofan, Jane Hadipoespito's husband, became controversial in 2010 when he was sued by Jane's mother for identity fraud. Alter Hofan, previously Alterina Hofan, was categorized as a girl at birth. Later on he discovered that he had

Klinefelter's syndrome<sup>3</sup>. He decided to go through a surgery for gynaecomastia and for hypospadias so that the exterior of his male-looks are perfect, thus he can live as a man. He changed his identity and fell in love with Jane. When their marriage became news, the police took action to Jane's mother indictment: sex written on Alter's birth certificate did not match with that specified on his marriage form. The police performed a DNA test through buccal smear to determine whether Alter is a female or male. As explained by Prof. Faradz, head of the intersex clinic of the Kariadi hospital in Semarang, the technique is not a DNA test, thus it cannot detect Y chromosome. Only chromosome analysis can give the correct diagnosis. Based on the result of the buccal smear test, the police declared Alter as a "true woman". Therefore, the prosecutor demanded a prison term to Alter. Religious institutions also take part on the controversy, the Catholic Church, represented by Pastor Benny Susetyo, Secretary of the Indonesian Conference Bishops (KWI), says that what Alter has done is a defiance to nature, by changing his sex; therefore, his marriage with Jane is not legal (S. E. Wieringa, 2010, pp. 2–4). Wieringa also adds, "The conservative muslim clergy, [...], has similar opinions.

This case shows the fact that society in Indonesia, including religious and government institutions, is confused regarding intersexuality; they cannot differentiate the difference between sex (biological) and gender. The writer considers this to be reasonable because most people do not bother to seek more information regarding human sexuality, in addition to that, topics related to or

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<sup>3</sup> Having XXY chromosomes, but genitalia similar to male. (Kelly, 2007, p. 2)

contain the word “sex” is still taboo and not to be shared to public, and often is censored by the authority. Based on the writer’s experience in doing this study, access to information to intersexuality such as [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org)<sup>4</sup> is blocked by the mobile internet provider the writer is using. Nevertheless, such misconception about intersexuality and gender is unacceptable only because the fact says differently. Rognstad (2012, p. 9) in her study titled *The Representation of Gender in Virginia Woolf’s Orlando and Jeffrey Eugenides’s Middlesex* states that Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler share mutual understanding that gender is not determined from birth, but rather constructed through a temporal process.

Yet, there is some optimism. Malta has just adopted the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act in 2015. A break-through for the rights of transsexual and intersexual people in Malta. As quoted from UN Fact Sheet, this law is to “[...] prohibit surgery and treatment on the sex characteristics of minors without informed consent. It also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex characteristics” (“Intersex,” n.d., p. 2). This law is hoped to be an example for other countries to follow.

*Middlesex* is a very dense and complicated *bildungsroman* about Cal Stephanides, who formerly named Calliope Helen Stephanides, a person with intersexuality. *Bildungsroman*, as stated by Hawthorn (1985, p. 18), is the German term for a type of a novel that focuses on the character’s development from childhood to adulthood. The purpose of this type of novel is to portray closely the

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<sup>4</sup> [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org) (Intersex Society of North America). Last accessed 18 September 2015

main character's development throughout her/his early and later life. This is the intention of the writer of the novel, Jeffrey Eugenides, to make the reader fully understand who Cal is.

As the main character, Cal narrates the story starting from two generations before him. Starting from his grandparents, Desdemona and Lefty Stephanides, who are brother and sister; then to his parents, Milton and Tessie, who are cousins; and last, his: his births, development, and transition. He believes that he was born twice: in January 1960 and August 1974.

Desdemona and Lefty Stephanides are forced to run away when the Turkish army attacks Bursa and Smyrna. They board a ship that takes them to American soil. Knowing that their love toward each other is against the norm, they stage a fake courtship. It is convenient because, on the ship, no one knows that Desdemona and Lefty are siblings. Before the journey ends, they have been married in a Greek Orthodox marriage ceremony.

The story continues with how Lefty and Desdemona adjust to living in America. They live in Detroit together with their cousin, Sourmelina, and her husband. Desdemona and Lefty have two children, Milton and Zoë. Meanwhile Sourmelina and her husband have a daughter, Tessie. Milton marries Tessie after he comes back from fighting in World War II. They give birth to two children, Chapter Eleven Stephanides and Calliope Helen Stephanides.

The birth of the protagonist Cal is helped by Dr. Philobosian. He, too busy paying attention to the nurse, misidentifies Cal as female. Since then, he has been

raised as a girl. Not until he reaches sixteen years old does he find out that he is a 5-Alpha-Reductase pseudohermaphrodite. According to Preves (2003, p. 189), the cause of this condition is the enzyme that converses testosterone to another hormone does not function as it should be, resulting in the genital appearing female. Only when the person reaches puberty, masculinization takes place. The testicles will start to be visible although the penis will stay small.

In their confusion with Cal's condition, Tessie and Milton take him to meet a specialist in New York named Doctor Luce. It does not help that the doctor suggests medical correction to Cal's incongruous genitalia so that he can live as female and a "normal" girl. Confused and wanting to stay male, he decides to run away, changes his name from Calliope to Cal and lives as a man instead.

Cal's situation reflects the situation experienced by many intersex people. They are told to live as somebody they do not want to be. In the worst situation, medical "normalization", without the person's consent who is often too young to comprehend of the action taken, is performed which is unnecessary and irreversible. This is the concern in Wierenga's article.

*Middlesex* is not only interesting to the readers for having many details in Greek culture mixed with ancient Greek mythology, and real history that happened from 1920s to 1970s, but also rewarding for it is rich with values of life.



**Statement of the Problem**

Related to the title of the study, the research questions are generated as the following

1. What inner conflicts can be found in Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*?
2. What are the causes of the conflicts?
3. What are the solutions to the conflicts?

**Objective of the Study**

This study aims at finding out (1) the inner conflicts found in Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, (2) the causes of the conflicts, and (3) the solutions to the conflicts.

**Significance of the Study**

The writer hopes that this study will:

1. Show another dimension of human condition in literature.
2. Be helpful for parents or others to understand the problems that people with intersexuality may face.
3. Become another reference for someone who will make an analysis in the same field, especially students of FKIP Widya Mandala.

**Limitation of the Study**

The writer limits the study into the analysis of the inner conflicts as experienced by the main character only. The reasons for the rise of the inner conflicts along with the steps taken to overcome them are also to be discussed. There are more than ninety names of characters mentioned in the novel, thus, to facilitate this study to finish within the time frame, the writer will only include the round characters that have significant influence to the main character's gender transformation in the analysis process.

Objective criticism is used in the process of novel analysis that will be explained further in chapter two and social constructionist theory in the analysis of the inner conflicts. The writer may talk a little about the extrinsic elements of the novel only to support the analysis of the intrinsic elements.

**Theoretical Framework**

There are some underlying theories to discuss. They are as follows: (1) theory of literature, (2) theory of novel, (3) the elements of novel, (4) types of conflict, and (5) social constructionist theory.

**Definition of Key Terms**

In order to avoid misunderstanding, it is necessary to define some key terms used in this study.

**Conflict.** The opposition between two characters (such as a protagonist and an antagonist), between two large groups of people, or between the protagonist and a larger problem such as forces of nature, ideas, public values, and so on. Conflicts may also be internal, such as the protagonist struggling with his psychological tendencies (drug addiction, self-destructive behavior, and so on). (Wheeler, 2015)

**Inner Conflict.** Inner conflict is a psychological struggle within the protagonist mind. The struggle is usually in the form of opposing desires or values in the protagonist's own temperament (M. H. Abrams, 1998, p. 225).

**Sex.** Sex refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia. ("Definition of terms: Sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation," 2011)

**Intersex.** [Conditions where] sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads and chromosome patterns) [...] do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies ("Intersex what does 'intersex' mean?," 2015, p. 1).

**Middlesex.** *Middlesex* is a novel about Calliope Stephanides, an intersex person born in 1960 to a Greek-American family living in a wealthy suburb of Detroit. The novel is written by Jeffrey Eugenides (Eugenides, 2002).

### **Organization of the Study**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One deals with the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the objective of the study, the significance of the study, the scope and limitation of the study, the theoretical framework, the definition of key terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter II presents the review of the theories used in analyzing the literary work as well as the related studies. Chapter III lays out the research method of the study. Chapter IV presents the findings and the analysis of the study. Chapter V presents the conclusion of the study and the suggestions.