

**GENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN BUTOH: GENDER
SUBVERSION BY NYOBA KAN IN MALAYSIA**

LIM SIEW LING

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UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
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Abstract

This thesis examines the presence of subversive gender performativity in Butoh, a contemporary Japanese dance genre, of the Nyoba Kan dance company in Malaysia. The theory of gender performativity refers to gender roles performed by performers irrespective of their biological sex. As a social construct, gender performativity focuses on the idea of performing gender roles by the Nyoba Kan dancers who contest the hegemonic relationships assumed under normative gender roles. Subversive gender performativity, and acts of subverting normative gender roles, have become mainstream in performances of Butoh by Nyoba Kan. This study aims to show how subversive gender performativity has constructed Butoh performances as a distinctive representation of Butoh in Malaysia. As a pioneer of Butoh dance in Malaysia, Nyoba Kan uses contrastive gender identities to circumvent the predominant gender norms expected by a Malaysian audience. Hence, this study testifies to the presence of subversive gender performativity in its repertoire. This thesis posits that subversive gender performativity has become an ideological discourse in Nyoba Kan's Butoh choreographies. Thus, it is necessary that the trajectory of gender performativity is contextualised through studies Butoh performances staged by Nyoba Kan that purposefully contest with normative gender roles. Nyoba Kan's Butoh has introduced the notion of contrasting and transgressing normative gender roles in Butoh choreographies and has demystified sex and gender correlations in Butoh dance in Malaysia.



Abstrak

Tesis ini mengkaji kemunculan pemberontakan gender performativity (*subversive gender performativity*) dalam persembahan Butoh, iaitu suatu genre tari kontemporari yang berasal daripada Japan, yang dibawa oleh kumpulan tari Nyoba Kan di Malaysia. Gender performativiti merupakan teori gender yang diperkenalkan oleh Judith Butler pada tahun 1990. Beliau menerangkan gender sebagai suatu persembahan, di mana setiap individu perlu mempersembahkan watak-watak gender yang ditentukan oleh masyarakat mengikut jantina masing-masing. Persembahan Butoh oleh Nyoba Kan telah menberontak watak gender yang dikonstruksi oleh masyarakat, dengan mempersembahkan watak gender yang mencabar watak normatif yang diberi oleh masyarakat. Pemberontakan gender performativity yang dikenali oleh Judith Butler boleh difaham sebagai suatu tindakan yang memberontak watak gender yang bersifat normatif. Tindakan ini telah diaplikasi dalam persembahan Butoh yang dipentaskan oleh Nyoba Kan, sehingga ia menjadi salah satu tema utama dalam persembahan Nyoba Kan. Kajian ini ingin membincang bagaimana pemberontakan gender performativiti telah dikonstruksi dalam persembahan Nyoba Kan, sehingga ia menjadi satu representasi yang istimewa dalam Butoh di Malaysia. Sebagai perintis Butoh di Malaysia, Nyoba Kan telah mempersembahkan sifat gender yang berbeza dengan anggapan masyarakat. Tesis ini membuat hipotesis bahawa pemberontakan gender performativiti yang dicadangkan oleh Judith Butler adalah sinonim dengan persembahan Butoh oleh Nyoba Kan, dan ia telah diangkat sebagai wacana ideologi di dalam koreografi Nyoba Kan. Oleh demikian, tesis ini menumpukan perhatian dalam mengkaji trajektori gender performativiti dalam karya-karya Nyoba Kan sejak tahun 1995, kajian tersebut harus dijalankan menurut konteks tempatan. Selain itu, tesis ini telah memilih satu karya yang signifikan dengan topik kajian untuk analisis yang terperinci, iaitu *The Curse of the Forbidden Palace* yang dipentaskan pada tahun 2007. Karya ini sengaja

mempersembahkan watak feminin dengan tubuh lelaki, untuk mencabar anggapan hegemoni bahawa tubuh lelaki hanya dibenarkan mempersembahkan watak maskulin. Kemunculan pemberontakan gender performativiti di Nyoba Kan telah memperkenalkan kemungkinan yang baru terhadap hubungan antara jantina dan watak gender kepada penonton Butoh Malaysia. Pemberontakan gender performativiti dalam karya Butoh Nyoba Kan telah mendemonstrasikan hubungan yang tidak kekal antara jantina dan gender.



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CHAPTER 1 THE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Butoh is a contemporary dance genre that originated in Japan after World War II. It has been categorised as an avant-garde dance genre that subverted the popular dance genres in Japan of that time. Hence, subversion is an important part of Butoh dance that is employed in various aspects of Butoh performance. This thesis examines the existence of gender subversion in Butoh as performed by the pioneering Malaysian dance company Nyoba Kan. The focus of this thesis is a gender study of subversive gender performativity in Butoh performance, where the theory of gender performativity is applied as the primary theoretical framework.

The theory of gender performativity was introduced by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). In this book, Butler proposed that gender is a performative act, where all gender roles only function when the gender roles have been performed in a performative way. This means that all gender roles in a performance, and the performance itself, are performative because all gender roles conform to a set of acts, whereby every gender is expected to do certain types of actions irrespective of one's biological sex. Hence, women are expected to act in a feminine way and men need to act in a masculine way. The performativity of gender manifests itself in many aspects of our everyday life, from the way we converse, to our personal clothing choices and preferred hair style. However, in the seminal work of performativity by Austin (1962), he mentioned that there are no truth-evaluables on performative utterances¹. Based on J. L. Austin's argument of performative utterance,

¹ In the linguistic study, J. L. Austin defining performative utterances as the sentence that not only 'describe' or 'report', but the sentence rather to act or consummate an action, or to construct and perform an identity, hence the uttering not constating anything or can be said as not 'true or false'.

Butler posits that gender is a performative act, hence there are no true or false correlations between sex and gender.

Subversion can be defined as an act of destroying or overthrowing a legally constituted law, or the morale of a governing authority. In relation to gender, subversion refers to the action of overturning or overthrowing the predominant gender roles constructed in society. In Butoh, subversion can be seen through its establishment of overturning the validity of pre-existing dance forms. Butoh does not conform to any pre-existing dance form. Its founders, Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno have overthrown conventional and prevalent dance aesthetic and technique in creating Butoh. They introduced Butoh to the spectators with shows which have included blatantly subversive themes such as pedophilia and homosexual love since their inaugural Butoh performance, *Forbidden Colours*.

By using subversion, the defeating of normative² sex and gender correlations can be conveyed meaningfully. The idea of gender subversion was introduced by Judith Butler (1990), who proposed that gender subversion is a way of collapsing the socially constructed compulsory binary relationships of sex and gender. Butler claims that gender binary³ is constructed by the dominant culture in a society. Gender binary refers to the artificial classification by divided gender into two rigid distinctive category followed the biological sex in male or female. The reiterated acting of culturally constructed gender roles constitute normative gender roles and gender binary in society. She argues that if gender roles are constructed, then new possibilities for signifying gender codes would be opened through the repetitious practice of a subversive gender performance. Therefore, Butler suggested performing subversive gender roles to

² Refers to an ideal standard constructed by society. Here, it refers to social determine sex and gender correlations, which masculine for male and feminine for female. See Butler (1990), Chapter 3, for more explanation.

³ Social constructed concept that classification gender into two distinct gender groups, men and women, irrespective of two biological sex groups, male and female.

redeploy the culturally constructed normative gender roles and to destroy gender binary in society. However, all subversive gender acts have to be performed juridically (Butler, 1990).

The idea of gender performativity in subversive gender roles as suggested by Butler appears frequently in Nyoba Kan's Butoh performances. I observed that there are increasing numbers of Butoh practitioners who have performed subversive gender roles in Butoh performances. The number of Butoh practitioners exhibiting feminine male, masculine female, androgyny or a genderless dancing body in their Butoh performance has gradually grown. The most distinctive example of this is the character of the Green Snake played by Nyoba Kan's founder and artistic director, Lee Swee Keong. Lee has played this feminine character with his male body for over 10 years. Subversive gender performativity has eventually become an ideological discourse in Nyoba Kan's Butoh performances as well as being familiar with and accepted by Butoh spectators in Malaysia.

According to Judith Lynne Hanna (1988), the reconstitution of gender roles in dance has a significant meaning in society, because both dance and gender are social acts that contribute to the emergence of culture. In this manner, subversive gender roles that constitute and are continually practiced by the Nyoba Kan are significant to the local society. Subversive gender roles that are regularly performed in Nyoba Kan's work have challenged Malaysia's Butoh spectators by destroyed gender binarism, and opening up a new way of viewing correlations between sex and gender.

Through observing Nyoba Kan's Butoh works consistently over the years, a number of Nyoba Kan's recurring choreographic pieces have included subversive gender performance. The practices on gender subversion in Nyoba Kan's choreography eventually attracted the researcher's attention, with the intention of launching an

academic study based on various questions, such as: Does Nyoba Kan present subversive gender performativity? Does the presence of subversive gender performativity in Butoh proliferate gender possibilities? Can subversive gender performativity in Nyoba Kan's work create a noticeable impact among Butoh practitioners and spectators in Malaysia? With the existence of such questions, this research was conducted to explore the contributing factors that have caused this phenomenon to occur in Malaysia Butoh, by 1) examining the presence of subversive gender performativity in Nyoba Kan's Butoh, and 2) the manner in which Nyoba Kan demystifies the interrelationships of sex and gender through their Butoh performances.

1.2 Background of Study

This study is based on my observation of subversive gender performativity in Malaysian Butoh dance as performed by Nyoba Kan. It was conducted to clarify what and when subversive gender performativity occurs in Nyoba Kan's work in order to test the hypothesis of subversive gender performativity that is present in Nyoba Kan's work and which has embodied Butler's ideas about gender as a performative style. Their work demystifies the binary sex and gender relationships which are not constant, by performing various subversive gender roles that move outside of the binary. This thesis will highlight the diachronic and synchronic aspects of Butoh dance and their relationship with gender issues, specifically subversive gender performativity. A diachronic analysis is applied as an important method of understanding the development of the Butoh dance in Malaysia. In addition to studying the relationship between dance and the dance practitioner, this research also investigates the synchronic relationship between dance and the relevant individuals, who are the dancers and choreographers.

The aspects studied in this category included methods of training, the purpose of

dancing or choreographing a performance, and the background of the performers and choreographers.

This thesis refers to Judith Butler's book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) as a key text on the theory of gender performativity. According to Butler, gender is a performative role which has been drilled and repeated by individuals in everyday life and presented at a certain time and space. "Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler, 1990, p.151). Butler claims that performativity is the result of naturalisation through repetitive performances focusing on gender.

This study analyses issues of gender performativity as introduced by Judith Butler in Butoh performances in Malaysia. The case study for this research is Nyoba Kan, the only active Butoh Dance Company in Malaysia. The company produces many vibrant performances and activities, promoting the art of Butoh in Malaysia, and has developed a group of faithful supporters since its inception in 1995. Nyoba Kan addresses the sensitive topic of gender subversion in their Malaysian Butoh dance performances through the presence and representation of subversive gender performativity, demonstrating the possibilities of gender diversity. Gender diversity appears when the artists grasp that the nature of gender is a culturally imposed repeated act, and they become liberated from confined gender roles. This research demonstrates how such liberation can inspire artistic creations through Butoh dance performances.

1.3 Statement of Problem

In the Malaysian contemporary dance scene, Nyoba Kan is renowned for their subversive gender performativity which represents androgyny and transvestism through a parodied stage appearance in Butoh performance. The on-stage imagery representing

subversive gender roles to the spectators in the audience has become a predominant theme in Nyoba Kan's Butoh performances, making them a unique dance company in Malaysia.

From the early sporadic performances up until the inaugural Butoh Festival in Malaysia in the year 2008, Nyoba Kan has grown through bold experimental efforts in their choreography and performances. The style of Butoh presented by Nyoba Kan has been largely influenced, adapted or 'localised' by cultural context and social experiences in Malaysia. Over the years, Nyoba Kan has developed a group of faithful supporters in Malaysia. The localised representation in Nyoba Kan's Butoh strikes a responsive chord to Malaysian spectators, and succeeds in attracting new audiences to purchase tickets for their shows.

This thesis investigates subversive gender performativity as a significant appearance in Nyoba Kan's Butoh from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives. Diachronic studies assist in understanding the background and development of Malaysian Butoh by Nyoba Kan. Similarly, a synchronic study is applied to test the appearance and influence of subversive gender performativity in Nyoba Kan's Butoh, focusing on the way in which Butoh can be used as a medium to decrypt the relationship between sex and gender.

1.4 Objective of Study

The main objective of this research is to examine the existence of subversive gender performativity in Butoh performance in Malaysia. Through an analysis of choreographed works by Nyoba Kan, this research aims to show how Nyoba Kan utilises Butoh as a medium to reveal the inconsistent relationships between sex and gender, by including subverted gender normative gender roles in their work. The

research also examines subversive gender performativity as a significant inclusion in Nyoba Kan's work, since it has become a distinctive image in their version of Butoh. Through performances using parody and androgyny, Nyoba Kan's work portrays Butler's view on gender as mimicked acts that do not constitute sex, offering audiences a different perspective on sex and gender relations by breaking down gender binary in their work.

The researcher simultaneously studied how the representation of subversive gender performativity in Nyoba Kan's Butoh performance impacts Butoh and Butoh practitioners in Malaysia.

1.5 Significance of the Research

There is currently a paucity of data about the Malaysian dance scene, especially in contemporary dances such as Butoh. This research fills that gap by providing an academic reference and historical documentation of Butoh dance in Malaysia. It also aims to instill an appreciation of the Butoh arts in Malaysia, as well as document Nyoba Kan's valuable contributions to gender subversion in the Malaysian Butoh dance scene, and the development of Butoh in Malaysia generally. This research is expected to benefit local and international performing arts scholars and the performing arts community in providing a greater understanding about the uniqueness of the Butoh dance in Malaysia.

1.6 Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach method which includes participant observation, as well as observation and interviews, in order to gather in-depth information and knowledge about the subject of the study.

In the pre-fieldwork phase, observations were undertaken to investigate the status of gender construction in Malaysia from diachronic aspects. To examine the synchronic aspects, observations were undertaken to gain knowledge about how Nyoba Kan roused the gender issue of gender subversion in Butoh performances based on the local context. This pre-fieldwork was supported by extensive reading on gender theories and performing arts theories to consolidate knowledge of the research topic.

Participant observations and informal interviews were the main research tools utilised during the field research. Through participant observation in productions, workshops, performances, and other activities organised by Nyoba Kan, the researcher gained a better understanding of Butoh dance and Nyoba Kan. Intensive involvement, participation and observation assisted in obtaining detailed and accurate information about the benefits of the research. This method provided novel insights from the emic account, and an increased understanding of the semiotics of the Butoh dance as performed by Nyoba Kan, as well as the ease of gazing at dance from the beholder's perspective.

Besides participant observation and studying the dance from an emic perspective, numerous observations were undertaken synchronously to analyse the dance. The etic observation was important in acting as a gate-keeper to ensure that the research was conducted on a non biased basis.

Informal interviews involved semi-structured and non-structured interviews on both categories of performer and non-performer, to provide an understanding of the background, dance intention, point of view of Butoh, as well as the gender of performers and the audience group. Interviews with a few key informants including the choreographer and dancers facilitated in observing the issue of gender subversion that

are attempted in Butoh through the eyes of the beholders, as well as understanding why and how Nyoba Kan attempt gender subversion in their Butoh performances.

Compiled data collected on the field as well as collecting secondary sources such as scholarly articles and journals, catalogues, audio-visual recordings, and relevant reviews were undertaken during the post-fieldwork phrase. During the field research, related Butoh videos performed by Nyoba Kan were collected and analysed. In the post-fieldwork phrase, critical analyses were undertaken by viewing or re-viewing relevant Butoh performances by Nyoba Kan.

1.7 Limitations

A limitation of the research was in measuring the impact of subversive gender performativity in Malaysian society, due to only a very small percentage of Malaysians known to be practicing Butoh. Hence, this limits the scope of the study to Butoh practitioners only. Nyoba Kan stands as an independent Butoh dance company, where all production and activities are through limited participation by Nyoba Kan's official members. Therefore, it was limited to observing performances when participating in their dance rehearsals, but found an appropriate role within the group to observe to some extent. However, there were instances where members of Nyoba Kan permitted participant observation which overcame this problem. On the other hand, participation in Butoh workshops conducted by Butoh dance master Lee Swee Keong from Nyoba Kan opened up another space for the researcher to gain direct experience of the dance form.

Nyoba Kan has been producing Butoh performances in Malaysia since 1995. To narrow the scope of the study, a Butoh performance staged in 2007 by Nyoba Kan are

the focus of this analysis. This is because this performance inspiring me to have a discussion about the gender issues attempted on the performances.

1.8 Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to outline the existing knowledge about gender, performativity, as well as the correlations between dance, sex and gender. This review will focus on secondary sources relevant to the field of research, including books, journal articles, electronic journals, newspapers, magazines, theses and dissertations, reports, and documentaries.

Three key references on the topic of gender include Judith Butler's books *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies that Matters: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004). In the book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler introduces the seminal notion of gender performativity. She is critical that gender binary has been constructed by society, where universality presumes that humans are divided into two major sexuality groups with common gender characteristics and interests. She rejects the idea which assumes that the building of masculine and feminine gender identities are an inevitable and inescapable fact, claiming that gender is a performative act learned and performed by the human body. Butler argues that the way the body acts is a result of socially constructed subjects in specific contexts, and that this is a culturally significant display of a performative act. Butler also stated that gender is performative in that it reflects what an individual does at particular times. Gender is not an expressive act according to Butler, thus the definition of gender remains contingent and open to interpretation, rather than being a fixed attribute in a person. According to Butler, gender reality is performative. Gender should be seen as a fluid variable which is

flexible, free floating, can be changed and shifted according to different contexts and times.

Butler further developed her distinctive theory of gender in *Bodies that Matters: On the Discursive Limits of Sex and Undoing Gender*. In this book, Butler examines how the power of heterosexual hegemony took the human body as 'material', operating to constrain 'sex' from the outset. The hegemonic power sets bodily boundaries which account for what could be considered a viable sex. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler focuses on the issue of undoing the restrictive gender norms while refining her theory of gender performativity. She posits that gender and sexuality norms fail to govern as the constraints on recognisable personhood. Gender theory as established in Butler's academic study features her clear and comprehensive interpretation of gender and sexuality. This book served as a crucial guide in developing my argument on the issues pertaining to gender performativity while analysing the selected Butoh works of Nyoba Kan.

Judith L. Hanna's *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire* (1988) is an important reference book, which examines the correlations between dance, sex and gender. According to Hanna, dance is an inherent art form through which artists can express themselves. A range of emotions can be expressed through dance, including questions about gender identity, or challenging socially and culturally constructed gender roles. Hanna critically discusses the implication of gender in dance, and discusses the way in which dance, sex and gender interact with each other. Her discussion on the gender liberation found in dance is fundamental to my analysis of the gender issues found in Butoh performances.

The Sociology of Gender: An Introduction to Theory and Research (2005) by A.S. Wharton offers a clear introduction to gender theory from a sociological viewpoint.

In this book, Wharton develops her gender theory through a discussion on gender as part of an individual, gender as part of social interaction, and gender as a social construction. Wharton claims that mainstream perception in patriarchal society has constructed gender binary in the social system. Gender binary enforced by society discourages and brings prejudices upon individuals who do not perform appropriate gender roles within social expectations. The author acknowledges the queer gender community and discusses the possibilities of a variety of gender expressions. Her critical discussion based on the sociology of gender was crucial in assisting me to contextualise the relationships between gender and society in the current study on Butoh dance in Malaysia.

Performance Studies: An Introduction (2005) by Richard Schechner includes introductory theories in the field of performance studies. Schechner's performance theory is utilised in this thesis, to compare the ideas of performance and performativity as put forward by Judith Butler. *Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography* (1999) edited by Theresa J. Buckland is a collection of various ethnographical field experiences by leading exponents of dance ethnography. This collection of essays provided the theoretical and methodological framework to conduct my own fieldwork with a high level of competency. *Ankoku Butoh: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness* (2007) by Susan B. Klein provides a general outline to the history and philosophy of Ankoku Butoh in Japan. This book also examines Butoh technique and the aesthetic of Butoh. The diachronic analysis compiled by Klein was crucial for the researcher in gaining a better understanding of the background of the Japanese Butoh from its birth in the bleak post-war landscape of 1950s to become an important post-structural art form in the dance world today.

Kazuo Ohno's World: From Without and Within (2004) by Kazuo Ohno and his son Yoshita Ohno is a collection of interviews, talks and workshops with the Butoh creator Kazuo Ohno, his son and other co-performers. *Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh: The Artistic Thoughts and Body Expression* (2010) and *The Iconology of Rose-Colored Dance: Reconstructing Tatsumi Hijikata* (2000) by Yoichi Sumi aggregated previous research and articles on Hijikata's Butoh work. These three books provided the choreography method, Butoh techniques and an analysis of Butoh works created by two Butoh masters, Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata. These books were important resources in gaining a better understanding of the core philosophies of Butoh dance by the Butoh founders. However, Butoh technique has changed gradually when it been practiced by artists all around the world.

The local academic publication *Making Contemporary Dance in Malaysia in the 1990s* (2000) and *Choreography: A Malaysia Perspective* (2004) by Joseph Gonzales presents historical perspectives and outlines the developments in Malaysian contemporary dance since the 1990s. Gonzales's book offers an overview of the important local contemporary dance artists who have contributed to and influenced Malaysian contemporary dance. These books include exposes which discuss the historical development of Malaysian contemporary dance. His writing is useful for me to ease the process of interpreting local contemporary dance work. A local academic article *Persembahan Butoh di Malaysia* (2009) by Leng Poh Gee discusses the historical background of the Japanese Butoh and Malaysian Butoh. This article introduces Butoh pioneers and the Butoh companies in Malaysia, using the theory of performing studies to examine the influence of Butoh in the Malaysian contemporary dance world. It provides an overview on Malaysia Butoh and was therefore important reading material for me to understand and examine Butoh in the local context. Extending this literature,

my research considers alternative focus by spans across Butoh in Malaysia and gender
performativity on gender subversion in Nyoba Kan’s work.



CHAPTER 2 GENDER PERFORMATIVITY AND GENDER-ROLE

SUBVERSION

This chapter includes a discussion and a brief introduction to gender from the sociological perspective, as gender is a specific term associated with social construction. Socially constructed gender roles are expected to be learned and played out by members of society in the process of gender socialisation. Gender expectations in society deeply influence how an individual is perceived, based on their biological sex. Males and females are assigned to learn, practice and perform distinct gender roles that are deemed appropriate to their biological sex. However, sociological studies have made a clear distinction between sex and gender, and clearly demonstrate that gender is not determined exclusively by biological sex.

The discussion in this chapter will focus on gender from the sociological perspective, and various strands of feminist studies, specifically the opposition of gender binarism. It is my intention to narrow down the scope of discussion within the local context by presenting an overview on the status of gender and the queer community in Malaysia. After examining feminist theory, the arguments put forward by Judith Butler in her theory of gender performativity and gender subversion, will be discussed.

2.1 Gender

Gender is closely associated with the meaning of masculinity and femininity in a social context (William, 2007). Gender studies emerged in the discipline of Sociology in the 1950s. In 1955, sociologist John Money coined the term 'gender role' to signify the respective sociocultural behaviours of the human body which present gender as either male or female (Money, 1955). In the sociological concept, gender plays a key role in

ordering a human's life, attitudes and behaviour. Gender roles according to Money, generally refer to socially designed sets of behaviours, attitudes, and motivations which correspond with anatomical sex. Gender studies have since emerged and have remained an important part of sociological study to the present day.

Contemporary sociologists Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin proposed that gender is a "system of social practice" (1999, p.191). Social practice consistently rehearses social actions in everyday life in order to reproduce a set of socio-cultural traits within a society. The socioculturally defined gender traits are enhanced in social practice, in an attempt to shape a gender system, as well as maintain conceptualised gender roles in society. From a sociological perspective, gender is produced by practices that interrelate with culture, social hierarchy, and religion, hence, gender is a social product that has a significant meaning in a given society. Social practice in gender roles are carried out to mark the difference between genders.

Sociologists Davidson and Gordon (1979) state that many in society will conveniently determine one's gender solely based on their anatomical sex group. From a sociological viewpoint, it is inevitable for society to assign socially constructed gender roles according to one's biological sex. Consequently the human body is primarily adorned to display the social determination of such masculine and feminine identifications. Socially constructed gender roles can be manifested in a person's external appearance, for example body type, hairstyle, dress sense, speech patterns, mannerisms, stereotypical gender behaviours and other characteristics that suggest masculinity and femininity. From a sociological perspective, setting and practicing distinct gender roles corresponding with one's sex group so that the society can identify and categorise individuals at first sight is important. For example, external gender appearance could automatically associate a person with a specific sex group,

employment choices and other social roles. In order for all individuals to possess identical gender, social practices in the form of socioculturally defined gender roles have become indispensable tools in society.

Sociological studies have classified gender into two major categories which correspond with two rigidly identifiable sex groups: masculine and feminine. In general, the male sex is expected to display socioculturally defined masculine gender role characteristics, while the female sex is expected to display feminine gender role characteristics. Traditional masculine traits in most patriarchal and heterosexual hegemonic societies are aggressiveness, competitiveness, assertiveness, ambitiousness, insensitivity, courage, dominance, independence, virility, rationality, ability to analyse, strength, and sexual aggression. In stark contrast, traditional perceptions of feminine characteristics are generally assumed to be kindness, receptiveness, intuitiveness, tenderness, contentedness, passiveness, cooperativeness, timidity, sympathy, compassion, submissiveness, dependency, emotionalism, and sensitivity (Wharton, 2005). These two groups of respective gender roles have been inappropriately and widely practiced by society yet compulsorily and institutionally, it is inevitable to learn appropriate socioculturally defined gender roles, as identified by what is considered to be 'right or wrong'.

Gender roles are social products which encourage clear segregation between the sexes in socialisation. Socialisation refers to the continual process of understanding and learning social norms, customs and values. Socialisation is an essential process for an individual to attain the social skills needed to communicate with other members of society. Those who do not faithfully follow instituted gender norms and standard gender practices of the society may be treated as an anomaly. For instance, men who possess feminine traits, may be ridiculed and pressured, or become victims of prejudice from

their male peers. As few can live in a total vacuum of sealed, complete isolation, these 'anomalies' have opted willingly or reluctantly to accept gender normalisation and socialisation in order to be better received by the society (Davisson & Gordon, 1979).

With regards to gender, socialisation resulting from masculinity for men and femininity for women, perpetuates the social phenomena of what is considered a 'natural' appearance. There are social efforts to indoctrinate, preserve and protect socially constructed binary sex and gender relationships, and further naturalise gender binary in society. As many in society will demarcate the sexes into two rigid sex groups - male and female - in a male-centered, patriarchal social context, the male is always positioned in a higher social status than the female. Social status refers to a ranked system of classes which categorise people in society. Each grade or category in such a ranked system can significantly determine how society members are defined and treated. Feminist studies show that the naturalisation of the binary relationships between sex and gender has projected an unintended engendering which reinforces gender stereotypes and prejudices according to a person's anatomical sex. The anatomical male body would automatically enjoy a higher social status in a socially determined ranked system, while women in binary with an anatomically female body would be categorised in lower classes in a socially ranked system in patriarchal society. Such socially defined gender traits, clearly reinforce the bipolar identification of male and female, and thus wrongly create an imbalanced gender domination of men over women.

Gender status has also been discussed by anthropologist, Alicia Chavira-Prado who uses the term 'gender structure' to define the hierarchical gender system in a society, or to describe a symmetrically designed gender status for men and women.

Consistent with sociological studies on gender status, Chavira-Prado's gender structure reveals that in a patriarchal society, men have been placed on a higher status in the