

Gendered Psyche: A Psychoanalytical Reading of Jacob Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story*

Sara Eliana Kuriakose¹ & K. Maragathavel²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Engineering and Technology, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur Campus, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

² Research Supervisor, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Engineering and Technology, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur Campus, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Correspondence: Sara Eliana Kuriakose, Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Faculty of Engineering and Technology, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur Campus, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: sk4803@srmist.edu.in

Received: February 13, 2024

Accepted: April 17, 2024

Online Published: May 17, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v14n5p63

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n5p63>

Abstract

This literary research paper employs psychoanalytic literary theory to delve into the complex interplay between identity formation and transgender experiences in Jacob Tobia's memoir titled *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story*. Through the lens of psychoanalysis, the study aims to unravel the intricate layers of self-discovery, acceptance, and resistance present in the text. By closely examining the text, the paper explores how psychoanalytic concepts like the unconscious, symbolism, and repression contribute to an enriched understanding of transgender characters' psychological landscapes.

The analysis focuses on the representation of transgender characters in literature, examining how their narratives echo and diverge from psychoanalytic frameworks such as those proposed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. The paper argues that psychoanalytic approaches can shed light on the internal conflicts and external societal pressures that shape transgender identities within the literary realm. Through carefully examining character motivations, symbolism, and narrative structures, the study elucidates how these works engage with psychoanalytic concepts to offer nuanced and empathetic portrayals of transgender experiences.

Furthermore, this research explores the broader implications of employing psychoanalytic perspectives in the analysis of transgender literature, contending that such an approach can deepen our understanding of the complex and often subconscious dynamics at play in the construction of gender identity. Drawing connections between psychoanalytic theory and literary representation, this paper contributes to ongoing discussions surrounding the psychological dimensions of transgender experiences in literature, offering insights into the intricate relationship between identity formation and psychoanalytic frameworks within transgender narratives.

Keywords: Transgender Literature, Psychoanalytic Theory, Identity Formation, Gender Transition, Literary Analysis

1. Introduction

In the realm of gender studies and literary analysis, the exploration of identity and its intricacies often finds resonance in the rich tapestry of psychoanalytic frameworks. This paper embarks on a nuanced journey, delving into the depths of the gendered psyche, specifically in the context of Jacob Tobia's transformative narrative presented in *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story*. By employing psychoanalytic lenses, particularly drawing from the seminal works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, this paper endeavours to unravel the complexities of Tobia's gender journey, shedding light on the psychoanalytic dimensions embedded within the narrative. Jacob Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* serves as a poignant and personal account that invites readers into the author's intimate exploration of their gender identity. In the endeavour to decode Tobia's narrative, the psychoanalytic frameworks proposed by Freud and Lacan emerge as invaluable tools. Freud's pioneering theories on the unconscious, sexuality, and the structural components of the psyche, alongside Lacan's concepts of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, provide a nuanced foundation for understanding the psychological underpinnings of gender identity.

Sigmund Freud's groundbreaking insights into the unconscious mind, as presented in works such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, offer a lens through which to examine the hidden desires, conflicts, and symbolic expressions shaping Tobia's gendered experiences. Freud's tripartite model of the psyche—the ego, id, and superego—proves instrumental in dissecting the internal struggles, societal influences, and the negotiation of norms constituting the intricate tapestry of Tobia's self-discovery. The integration of Jacques Lacan's theories, found in seminal works like *Écrits* and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, deepens the exploration of Tobia's narrative. Lacan's examination of the Mirror Stage, where the individual forms a sense of self through identification with an image, becomes particularly relevant in unpacking the construction of gender identity and the societal expectations embedded within Tobia's evolving self-perception. (Whitebook, 2017) The paper seeks to navigate the intersections of Tobia's narrative with Freudian and Lacanian frameworks. The analysis will not only illuminate the internal conflicts and desires within

Tobia's gender journey but also contribute to broader discussions on the relevance of psychoanalysis in deciphering the intricacies of transgender narratives. Through this exploration the paper aims to engage with Tobia's narrative on a deeper level, unravelling the layers of the gendered self through the profound insights offered by psychoanalytic theory. The primary aim of this paper is to employ psychoanalytic frameworks, particularly those proposed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, to comprehensively analyse and interpret the gender journey articulated by Jacob Tobia in their (preferred pronoun) memoir. The paper seeks to unravel the intricate layers of the gendered psyche within Tobia's narrative, shedding light on the psychological dimensions that shape the author's self-discovery and identity formation. The paper also aims to apply Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concepts, including the unconscious mind, sexuality, and the structural components of the psyche (ego, id, and superego), to decipher hidden desires, conflicts, and symbolic expressions within Tobia's narrative.

The paper also endeavours to integrate Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, the tripartite structure of the psyche (Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real), to analyse the construction of Tobia's gender identity, considering societal influences and self-perception. By utilizing psychoanalytic tools, the paper aims to unveil unconscious influences on Tobia's gendered experiences, exploring how societal norms, desires, and conflicts manifest within the author's narrative. The paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on gender studies by employing psychoanalytic lenses to interpret a transgender narrative. It aims to demonstrate the relevance and applicability of psychoanalytic frameworks in understanding the nuanced and complex nature of gender identity. Through a psychoanalytical reading, the paper aims to deepen the understanding of transgender experiences in literature, using Tobia's narrative as a lens to explore universal themes of self-discovery, societal expectations, and the negotiation of gender norms.

The purpose of this paper extends beyond a mere analysis of Tobia's narrative; it is a scholarly endeavour to bridge the realms of psychoanalysis and transgender literature. By unravelling the gendered psyche within Tobia's story, the paper seeks to enrich academic discussions on the intersection of psychology, literature, and gender studies. The analysis serves as an exploration into the applicability and insights offered by psychoanalytic frameworks in interpreting contemporary transgender narratives, contributing to a more profound understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender identity. Ultimately, the purpose is to offer a nuanced and comprehensive psychoanalytic reading that illuminates the complexities of Tobia's gender journey while providing broader insights into the evolving landscape of gender studies in literature.

The significance of the research paper lies in its multifaceted contributions to the fields of literature, gender studies, and psychoanalysis. By focusing on Jacob Tobia's autobiographical work, the paper aims to offer a nuanced exploration of the transgender experience, contributing to the representation and understanding of diverse gender identities in literature. Tobia's narrative serves as a valuable case study, providing insight into the complexities of self-discovery, identity formation, and societal expectations within the transgender context. It also offers a framework for understanding and interpreting transgender experiences in literature and expands the discourse on the application of psychoanalysis in gender studies.

The interdisciplinary approach of integrating psychoanalytic frameworks, particularly those of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, allows for a comprehensive analysis of the gendered psyche. By applying these theoretical perspectives, the paper contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the applicability of psychoanalysis in understanding contemporary issues related to gender identity. This research adds depth to the understanding of how psychoanalytic concepts can be employed to interpret and interpret the complexities of transgender narratives.

The thesis statement of this paper posits that by applying the psychoanalytic frameworks of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to Tobia's autobiographical work, a deeper understanding of the psychological dimensions of gender identity emerges. The analysis seeks to unravel the complexities of Tobia's gender journey by examining the unconscious influences, hidden desires, and symbolic constructions of identity embedded within the narrative.

2. Review of Literature

Numerous studies have explored Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical frameworks from diverse angles. However, there remains a gap in the literature concerning the application of these frameworks to analyse the psychological dimensions of gender identity within Jacob Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story*. As such, this research paper seeks to contribute to scholarly conversations surrounding gender identity, literature, and psychoanalytic theory by undertaking a novel examination of Tobia's narrative.

The article "Trans-itory identities: some psychoanalytic reflections on transgender identities" (2018) by Alessandra Lemma, discusses the psychoanalytic reflections on transgender identities, focusing on the challenges faced by analysts working with young transgender individuals. It highlights the complexities of gender identity, the impact of body modifications, and the unconscious identifications that underpin the process of transition. The author emphasizes the need for nuanced understanding, open dialogue, and ethical considerations in working with transgender individuals, advocating for a developmental approach that emphasizes time, reflection, and respect for diverse perspectives.

"Transgender and Gender Diverse Identities in Psychoanalysis: A Critical Overview from Past to Current Perspectives" (2023) by Fabrizio Mezza, Selene Mezzalira, Vincenzo Bochicchio & Cristiano Scandurra, provides a critical overview of the evolving understanding of transgender and gender diverse (TGD) identities within the context of psychoanalysis. It traces the historical development of scientific and psychoanalytic perspectives on transgenderism, emphasizing the shift from pathologization to the recognition of the normative nature of gender diversity. The document also highlights the impact of mirroring experiences, the challenges faced by TGD individuals, and the

therapeutic approaches within the field of psychoanalysis.

Padd Farr in his research article titled “The Psychoanalyst and the “Transsexual”: Transgender Identities as Personal-Political Subjectivities” (2022), discusses the need for a paradigm shift in psychoanalytic discourse regarding transgender individuals. It emphasizes the personal-political nature of clinical encounters and advocates for a more respectful and empowering framework within psychoanalytic practice. Farr proposes a solution through Stryker's personal-political as a psychoanalytic relational paradigm.

The article “Psychoanalysis Needs a Sex Change” (2016) by Patricia Gherovici discusses the historical and contemporary interplay between psychoanalysis and transgenderism. It challenges the traditional psychoanalytic approach to transgender identity, advocating for the depathologization of transgender identity. The paper emphasizes the need for a more inclusive and collaborative approach to gender identity within psychoanalytic discourse.

The inaugural issue of TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly includes a section titled “Psychoanalysis” that highlights the complex relationship between body and psyche and the instability and uncertainty of sexual identity. This section features eighty-six short original essays that revolve around a particular keyword or concept related to transgender studies, written by emerging academics, community-based writers, and senior scholars. The essays explore the relationship between psychoanalysis and transgender studies, emphasizing the potential for psychoanalysis to offer tools for thinking about the complexity and particularity of any subjectivity, including transsexual subjectivity.

A thesis by A. K. Smith, titled “Gender as compromise formation: towards a radical psychoanalytic theory of trans*,” published in 2016, explores the possibility of fruitful collaboration between transgender theory and contemporary psychoanalytical theory. Smith argues that a radical rereading of psychoanalytic theory can offer a more nuanced understanding of transgender identity formation and challenge the binary between cisgender and transgender.

3. Methodology

The methodology employed in this paper is rooted in an interdisciplinary approach that integrates psychoanalytic frameworks, specifically those proposed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, with a focus on Tobia's autobiographical narrative. The study begins by conducting an in-depth textual analysis of Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story*, extracting key themes, narrative structures, and character dynamics that reveal the intricacies of the author's gender journey. Drawing on a theoretical approach towards Freudian principles, the research examines the unconscious influences, hidden desires, and internal conflicts embedded within Tobia's narrative, utilizing concepts such as the ego, id, and superego to illuminate the psychological landscape.

3.1 Textual Analysis of *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story*

The textual analysis of Jacob Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* forms the foundation of this research paper, providing a comprehensive examination of key themes, narrative structures, and character dynamics. Tobia's work, a poignant autobiographical narrative, serves as a rich source for understanding the author's gender journey. The analysis begins with a focus on Tobia's exploration of their own identity and the intricate ways in which the narrative unfolds. Within the text, Tobia delves into the challenges and triumphs of their coming-of-gender experience, offering readers a deeply personal account of navigating societal expectations, self-discovery, and the negotiation of gender norms. The analysis is driven by Tobia's narrative choices, linguistic nuances, and the overall construction of the autobiographical story.

This examination is grounded in the belief that the author's choice of language, narrative structure, and character portrayals serves as a window into the intricacies of their gender identity. As Tobia recounts personal experiences and emotions, the analysis looks for recurring motifs, shifts in tone, and the development of a narrative arc that encapsulates the complexities of the gendered psyche. The analysis extends to examine the interplay between Tobia's personal experiences, and the broader sociocultural context depicted in the text. The narrative is not only an individual story but also a reflection of the societal attitudes and norms that shape and challenge the author's journey. This contextualization enhances the depth of the analysis, providing insights into the intersections of the personal and the collective in the construction of gender identity.

The textual analysis draws on the author's vivid descriptions, dialogues, and introspective passages. It is guided by the principle that every word, sentence, and narrative choice in *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* contributes to the larger discourse on gender identity. By thoroughly examining the text, the analysis aims to uncover the nuances of Tobia's gender journey, creating a foundation upon which the subsequent psychoanalytical readings can build.

3.1.1 Key Themes

Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story by Jacob Tobia unfolds as a poignant narrative that intricately weaves together various key themes, offering readers a profound insight into the complexities of the author's gender journey. One prominent theme that emerges from the text is the exploration of identity labels and their transformation. Tobia, initially confronted with the pejorative term “sissy,” masterfully navigates the journey from societal stigmatization to self-empowerment. The theme of reappropriation and redefinition underscores Tobia's resilience in reshaping the meaning of the label, ultimately turning it into a source of strength and pride.

Central to the narrative is the theme of self-discovery and acceptance. Tobia embarks on a deeply personal exploration, navigating societal expectations and their own internalized judgments. The author grapples with the process of self-acceptance, embracing their authentic identity while challenging the constraints imposed by societal norms. This theme resonates throughout the narrative, shaping Tobia's

journey into a profound quest for self-love and understanding. The narrative also prominently features the theme of societal expectations and the pressure to conform to traditional gender norms. Tobia critically examines the constructed binaries of masculinity and femininity, highlighting the arbitrary nature of societal expectations. The exploration of societal pressures catalyzes Tobia's deconstruction of normative gender narratives, advocating for a more inclusive and fluid understanding of gender identity. The theme of familial dynamics and acceptance plays a significant role in Tobia's narrative. The author candidly shares experiences of navigating familial expectations, acknowledging both the challenges and triumphs encountered in the process. This theme contributes to a broader discourse on the intersections of personal identity within the familial context, offering readers a nuanced perspective on the complexities of coming out and seeking acceptance. Resilience is a recurrent thread in Tobia's narrative. The author courageously confronts adversity, whether in the form of societal judgments, familial expectations, or personal doubts. The theme of resilience underscores Tobia's unwavering commitment to living authentically, embodying strength in the face of societal and personal challenges.

The narrative explores the theme of fluidity in gender expression and personal identity. Tobia engages in a process of self-discovery marked by experimentation, challenging the conventional notions of fixed gender categories. This theme invites readers to reconsider and embrace the fluidity inherent in the human experience, advocating for a more expansive and inclusive understanding of gender. The identification of these key themes within *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* contributes to the broader discourse on gender identity, self-empowerment, and societal expectations. Tobia's narrative serves as a testament to the multifaceted nature of the gendered experience, offering readers a rich tapestry of themes that resonate with the universal journey of self-discovery and acceptance.

3.1.2 Character Dynamics Analysis

Jacob Tobia introduces readers to a rich tapestry of characters whose dynamics play a pivotal role in shaping the author's narrative. At the heart of the memoir is Tobia's own character, portrayed with vulnerability and authenticity. The author navigates the intricacies of self-discovery, reflecting on the challenges, triumphs, and evolving understanding of gender identity. This internal exploration forms the nucleus of character dynamics, setting the tone for Tobia's interactions with the external world.

The family emerges as a central component of character dynamics, with Tobia delving into the complexities of familial relationships. The author provides a candid portrayal of family members, detailing their reactions, expectations, and the evolving dynamics as Tobia's gender journey unfolds. This exploration adds layers to the narrative, illustrating the impact of societal expectations on familial interactions and the transformative power of acceptance and understanding.

Friends and peers contribute significantly to character dynamics, serving as mirrors through which Tobia reflects on societal attitudes and norms. The memoir introduces readers to a diverse array of individuals who influence the author's perceptions of gender. Friendships become a lens through which Tobia explores the broader social landscape, providing a backdrop against which the author's identity takes shape.

The societal characters depicted in the narrative encompass a spectrum of attitudes and biases. Tobia encounters individuals who challenge, support or resist the author's journey. The portrayal of societal characters extends beyond individual interactions to encompass cultural and societal norms. These characters collectively contribute to the external forces that shape Tobia's experience of gender, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward non-conforming gender identities.

Within the LGBTQ+ community, Tobia encounters characters who share common experiences and challenges. The dynamics within this community become a source of solidarity, understanding, and shared narratives. The connections formed with other members of the LGBTQ+ community contribute to Tobia's sense of belonging and provide a supportive backdrop for exploring gender identity. This can also be seen in another autobiography written by a trans woman, Mia Violet, titled *Yes, You Are Trans Enough*,

Society as a whole does a really good job of convincing you that showing gender variance is a terrible idea... When you realise that we're essentially doing as a society is placing lifelong loaded expectations on children based on nothing but genitals, it seems quite ridiculous. Gendering children based on their bodies seems even more grievous when you remember that kids are not oblivious to this. They're very aware of these expectations as they start to mingle and enter schools. Children know they're at risk of being scrutinised and mocked for shaking up their gender presentation in any way. This devastates those who want to express themselves. (p. 31)

The character dynamics are not static; they evolve throughout the narrative. As Tobia's understanding of their own gender identity deepens, so too do the dynamics with other characters. The memoir captures the transformative power of self-discovery, illustrating how shifts in personal understanding can influence and reshape relationships with others. The interplay between Tobia's internal journey and the external influences of family, friends, societal characters, and the LGBTQ+ community forms a narrative mosaic that reflects the complexity of the author's experiences. The memoir offers readers a nuanced understanding of how character dynamics shape and are shaped by the evolving landscape of gender identity.

3.2 Freudian Psychoanalysis

Freudian psychoanalysis, rooted in the theories of Sigmund Freud, provides a foundational framework for understanding the intricacies of the human psyche. In the context of gender identity exploration, Freud's concepts offer valuable insights into the unconscious influences, desires, and conflicts that shape an individual's understanding of their own identity. Freud's tripartite model of the psyche, comprising the ego, id, and superego, serves as a cornerstone for psychoanalytic interpretation.

The ego, according to Freud, represents the conscious mind, the part of the psyche that interacts with the external world. In the exploration of gender identity, the ego plays a crucial role in mediating societal expectations and individual desires. Freud's work, particularly "The Ego and the Id" (1923), delves into the intricate balance that the ego must maintain between the demands of the id, the repository of unconscious desires, and the moral constraints imposed by the superego.

Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* can be analysed through a Freudian lens by examining the author's conscious and unconscious motivations. Freud's concept of repression, as outlined in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), suggests that individuals may suppress desires or experiences that are incongruent with societal norms. In the context of gender exploration, Tobia's memoir reveals instances where unconscious desires clash with societal expectations, shedding light on the internal conflicts inherent in the journey of self-discovery.

Freud's theory of sexuality, expounded in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), provides a lens through which to interpret the development of gender identity. Freud posits that sexuality is a pervasive force influencing human behaviour, and Tobia's narrative can be analysed in relation to the author's evolving understanding of their sexuality within the broader context of gender identity.

In applying Freudian psychoanalysis to Tobia's narrative, scholars may draw on the rich body of literature examining Freud's ideas in the context of gender studies. By scrutinizing the interplay between conscious and unconscious elements in the author's psyche, researchers can illuminate the complexities of Tobia's gender journey and contribute to a broader understanding of gender identity formation through a psychoanalytic lens.

3.2.1 Internal Conflicts

Internal conflicts, within the framework of Freudian psychoanalysis, refer to the psychological struggles and tensions that manifest within an individual's psyche, often involving clashes between conscious and unconscious desires, societal expectations, and moral norms. Sigmund Freud's conceptualization of the internal conflict is grounded in his tripartite model of the psyche, which consists of the ego, id, and superego. This theoretical framework provides a foundation for understanding the intricacies of internal conflicts, particularly in the context of gender identity exploration.

In Freud's essay, "The Ego and the Id" (1923), he explores the dynamic interactions between the ego, the rational and conscious aspect of the psyche; the id, the repository of unconscious desires; and the superego, the internalized moral and societal norms. Internal conflicts arise as the ego attempts to balance and reconcile the demands of the id and the superego. This framework is instrumental in analysing the internal struggles individuals may experience in negotiating societal expectations and their authentic gender identity.

To further contextualize the concept of internal conflicts in relation to gender identity, secondary sources offer valuable insights. In *Mismeasure of Woman: Why Women are Not the Better Sex, the Inferior Sex, or the Opposite Sex*, Carol Tavris (1992) examines the impact of societal gender norms on individual psychological well-being. Tavris explores how internal conflicts may arise when individuals grapple with conforming to societal expectations while navigating their authentic gender identity. This source contributes to the understanding of the external factors that contribute to internal conflicts in the realm of gender identity.

Contemporary psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow, in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978) and *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender, and Culture* (1999), extends Freudian concepts to analyse the formation of gender identity. Chodorow's work highlights how internal conflicts may emerge in the process of gender socialization, particularly within the family structure. The author explores how individuals navigate the internal tensions between their desires and the expectations imposed by societal gender roles.

The concept of internal conflicts, rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis, provides a nuanced perspective for understanding the psychological struggles individuals may face in the exploration of gender identity. By drawing on foundational psychoanalytic theories and contemporary scholarship, this paper will illuminate the complexities of internal conflicts in the context of gender identity formation, contributing to a more profound comprehension of the individual's internal landscape and the negotiation of societal expectations.

3.3 Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Lacanian psychoanalysis, influenced by the ideas of Jacques Lacan, presents a unique and influential perspective on understanding the complexities of the human psyche. Central to Lacanian theory is the concept of the Mirror Stage, introduced in Lacan's essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949). The Mirror Stage posits that a child, upon seeing their reflection in a mirror, experiences a crucial moment of self-recognition, laying the groundwork for the formation of identity. This process involves an identification with the idealized image in the mirror, representing an early and foundational encounter with one's sense of self.

The tripartite structure of the psyche in Lacanian psychoanalysis includes the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. The Imaginary, shaped by the Mirror Stage, encompasses the realm of images and illusions that contribute to the construction of identity. The Symbolic is characterized by language, law, and social structures that mediate human experience. The Real, in Lacanian terms, represents the unattainable and unrepresentable aspects of reality, resisting full symbolization.

Lacanian psychoanalysis is particularly relevant in the analysis of gender identity and its construction. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973), Lacan explores the symbolic order and language's role in shaping subjectivity. Gender, as a symbolic construct, becomes a crucial element in the formation of identity within Lacanian theory. Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* can be examined

through Lacanian lenses to identify how language and societal norms contribute to the construction of gender identity.

In *Transgender Psychoanalysis: A Lacanian Perspective on Sexual Difference*, Patricia Gherovici (2017) explores Lacanian concepts, including the Mirror Stage and the Symbolic Order, in relation to gender identity and sexuality. Gherovici's work extends Lacanian theory into contemporary discussions on subjectivity, providing insights into how gendered identities are negotiated within the Symbolic Order. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler engages with Lacanian psychoanalysis and develops the concept of performativity. Drawing on Lacan's ideas of the Symbolic Order, Butler argues that gender identity is not an inherent essence but is constructed through repeated performative acts within the societal symbolic framework. This intersection between Lacanian theory and Butler's performativity becomes relevant in analysing how gender identity is enacted and negotiated within Tobia's narrative.

3.3.1 Tripartite Structure of the Psyche

The tripartite structure of the psyche, a foundational concept in Freudian psychoanalysis, outlines the three distinct components that constitute the human mind. This model, consisting of the id, ego, and superego, was initially introduced by Sigmund Freud, and later expanded upon by various psychoanalytic theorists. The id, ego, and superego collectively represent the complex interplay of unconscious drives, conscious rationality, and internalized moral standards within an individual's psychological makeup.

Freud delineates the id as the primal and unconscious part of the psyche governed by the pleasure principle. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud explains how the id operates based on seeking immediate gratification of instinctual needs and desires, without consideration for external reality or moral constraints. The id constitutes the repository of unconscious impulses, serving as the source of primal drives and instincts.

The ego, according to Freud, operates in alignment with the reality principle. Expounded upon in "The Ego and the Id" (1923), the ego is the conscious and rational part of the psyche that mediates between the demands of the id, the external world, and the superego. It seeks to navigate the complexities of reality, satisfying the id's desires in socially acceptable ways. The ego plays a crucial role in maintaining a balance between instinctual impulses and societal norms.

The superego, introduced in the essay "The Ego and the Id," represents the internalized moral and societal standards that an individual inherits from societal structures, caregivers, and cultural influences. The superego acts as an internal regulator, enforcing moral values and societal norms. It comprises the conscience, which rewards morally acceptable behaviour, and the ego-ideal, which represents an individual's aspirations for virtuous conduct.

Charles Brenner in his textbook *An elementary textbook of psychoanalysis* (1974) provides a concise overview of these three phenomena:

"We may say that id comprises the psychic representatives of the drives, the ego consists of those functions which have to do with the individual's relation to his environment, and the superego comprises the moral precepts of our minds as well as our ideal aspirations.

The drives, of course, we assume to be present from birth, but the same is certainly not true of interest in or control of the environment on the one hand, nor of any moral sense or aspirations on the other. It is obvious that neither of the latter, that is neither the ego nor the superego, develops till sometimes after birth.

Freud expressed this fact by assuming that the id comprised the entire psychic apparatus at birth, and that the ego and superego were originally parts of the id which differentiated sufficiently in the course of growth to warrant their being considered as separate functional entities."

Each of these entities; the id, ego, and superego possess a high degree of complexity. Freud and other scholars have extensively discussed the development, functioning, and significance of each in shaping an individual's psychic life.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Sigmund Freud provides a comprehensive overview of his psychoanalytic theories, including the tripartite structure of the psyche. This essay serves as an accessible introduction to Freud's ideas, making it a valuable resource for scholars and students seeking to comprehend the foundational principles of psychoanalysis.

Dreams and Myths: A Study in Race Psychology (1909) by the renowned psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Karl Abraham delves into the intricacies of the unconscious mind, shedding light on the foundational principles of the id, ego, and superego. Abraham's insights provide a valuable perspective on the role of unconscious drives and instincts in shaping human behaviour, complementing Freud's seminal contributions.

The tripartite structure of the psyche provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of the human mind, as outlined by Freudian psychoanalysis. Engaging with primary and secondary sources facilitates a nuanced exploration of the id, ego, and superego, shedding light on the intricate interplay of unconscious desires, conscious rationality, and internalized moral standards within the psychological landscape.

3.3.2 Symbolic Construction of Gender Identity

The symbolic construction of gender identity, rooted in psychoanalytic theories, emphasizes the role of language, symbols, and cultural norms in shaping individuals' understanding of their gendered selves. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Symbolic Order plays a central role in the construction of subjectivity, including gender identity. This symbolic realm is formed through language, societal structures, and shared cultural meanings, influencing how individuals perceive and navigate their gendered experiences.

Jasbir K. Puar, in her book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), Puar introduces the concept of homonationalism, which refers to the co-optation of LGBTQ+ rights by nationalist and imperialist agendas. Puar argues that while some LGBTQ+ rights have gained acceptance in mainstream society, this acceptance often comes at the expense of other marginalized groups, such as transgender individuals, who continue to face discrimination and violence. This analysis highlights the complex ways in which societal attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals can be influenced by broader political and social forces, leading to the marginalization of certain identities within the community.

In *The Object Relation. Book IV, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (2021), by Jacques Lacan and translated by Adrian Price, expounds on the concept of the Symbolic Order and its significance in the formation of subjectivity. Lacan argues that language, as a symbolic system, mediates human experiences and constructs the framework through which individuals come to understand their identities. The symbolic construction of gender identity, therefore, occurs within the context of linguistic and cultural systems that prescribe meanings to masculine and feminine attributes.

Judith Butler, a prominent figure in gender studies, engages with the symbolic construction of gender identity in her groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler draws on Lacanian and post-structuralist perspectives to argue that gender is performative and enacted through repeated acts within the Symbolic Order. Her analysis emphasizes how cultural norms, language, and social practices contribute to the symbolic construction of gender, challenging essentialist notions of fixed gender identities.

Sociologist Erving Goffman, in *Gender Advertisements* (1979), explores the symbolic representation of gender in everyday life, particularly through visual media. Goffman's work reveals how gender identity is constructed and reinforced symbolically through images, gestures, and cultural symbols. By analysing advertisements, Goffman illustrates how societal expectations around gender roles are perpetuated through symbolic means, contributing to the construction of gender identity. One such incident can be read in the article titled “‘Do You See How Much I’m Suffering Here?’ | Abuse against Transgender Women in US Immigration Detention” that talks about transgender women held in US immigration.” At any given time, the United States holds scores of transgender women in immigration detention, including many who have fled to the US seeking protection from torture, sexual violence, and other forms of persecution in their home countries related to their gender identity or gender expression.” Transgender women in immigration detention face particularly harsh conditions, often exacerbated by past experiences of abuse. Solitary confinement, justified as a protective measure, can further traumatize them. Access to necessary medical care, including hormone replacement therapy and HIV-related treatment, is often delayed or denied altogether.

Within the context of feminist psychoanalysis, Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (1974) critically examines the symbolic order and its implications for gender identity. Mitchell explores how patriarchal structures are embedded in language and cultural symbols, shaping how individuals internalize and perform gender roles. Her work underscores the symbolic nature of gender norms and their impact on the psychoanalytic understanding of identity.

The symbolic construction of gender identity is also discussed in the context of queer theory. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler challenges conventional norms by highlighting how subverting and destabilizing gender categories can be a form of resistance against the symbolic order's normative constraints. This perspective contributes to a broader understanding of how individuals negotiate and resist the symbolic construction of gender identity.

The symbolic construction of gender identity involves the interplay of language, cultural symbols, and societal norms in shaping individuals' understanding of their gendered selves. Engaging with primary sources such as Lacan's seminars and secondary sources like Butler's and Goffman's works provides a multifaceted perspective on the symbolic dimensions of gender identity, enriching the discourse on how language and culture influence the complex process of identity formation.

4. Discussion and Analysis

The transgender community often faces unique challenges and sufferings while growing up, primarily related to societal expectations and the pressure to conform to binary gender norms. From an early age, transgender individuals may experience a profound sense of incongruence between their assigned gender at birth and their true gender identity. This incongruence can lead to a range of emotional and psychological struggles, as societal norms and expectations dictate conformity to a binary understanding of gender.

One of the primary sufferings faced by transgender individuals during their formative years is the intense pressure to conform to the gender assigned to them at birth. This pressure manifests in various aspects of life, including familial expectations, peer interactions, and institutional environments such as schools. The insistence on adhering to traditional gender norms can result in feelings of isolation, alienation, and a pervasive sense of not belonging. Transgender youth may internalize societal messages that invalidate their gender identity, leading to a profound internal conflict that can affect mental health and self-esteem.

Mia Violet, a transwoman, expressed in her autobiography that she was dismissed by her mother when she came out to her as a transgender which eventually made her slip into denial,

My mother stated that I must have been led astray by dizzying internet babble and hypnotically clever strangers; that surely I had gone looking for a quick fix answer and stumbled onto this obscure and bizarre label. I wanted to repeat myself and scream that she was utterly wrong, that I was a girl and transition was vital to me, but my confidence was destroyed. I gave up. (p. 61)

A study published by Jo Yurcaba titled, “‘Social contagion’ isn’t causing more youths to be transgender, study finds”, found that transgender and gender-diverse youth were significantly more likely to be victims of school bullying (38.7% in 2017 and 45.4% in 2019)

compared to gay and bisexual youth (30.5% in 2017 and 28.7% in 2019) and cisgender, heterosexual youth (17.1% in 2017 and 16.6% in 2019).

These statistics highlight the challenges faced by transgender youth in navigating societal expectations and norms related to gender and sexuality. The repetition of derogatory language such as “faggot” and the metaphor of a shrinking space symbolizing the constriction of identity within societal expectations further illustrate the pervasive influence of societal norms and expectations on the psyche of transgender individuals.

The internal conflict experienced by transgender youth can lead to feelings of isolation, alienation, and a pervasive sense of not belonging. Transgender youth may internalize societal messages that invalidate their gender identity, leading to a profound internal conflict that can affect mental health and self-esteem.

Parents, families, and friends of transgender youth need to provide support and protection, as well as to engage in open and honest dialogue about the challenges faced by transgender youth. This can help to create a safe and affirming environment for transgender youth and can contribute to their overall well-being and mental health.

Growing up within a society that often lacks understanding and awareness of diverse gender identities can exacerbate the suffering of transgender individuals. Many face bullying, discrimination, and harassment, both within their immediate communities and in broader social contexts. The lack of representation and acknowledgement of transgender identities in educational curricula and mainstream media can further isolate transgender youth, contributing to a sense of invisibility and marginalization.

Another significant aspect of the suffering experienced by transgender individuals while growing up is the struggle with body dysphoria. The incongruence between one's gender identity and the physical characteristics associated with the assigned gender can lead to profound discomfort and distress. The lack of societal acceptance and understanding of gender dysphoria may impede access to necessary medical and psychological support, exacerbating the challenges faced by transgender individuals during their formative years.

The pressure to conform to a binary gender system can hinder the exploration and expression of one's authentic gender identity. Transgender youth may feel compelled to suppress or hide their true selves, leading to a suppression of their identity, self-expression, and emotional well-being. The internal conflict arising from the need to conform to societal expectations while also yearning for authenticity can create significant emotional turmoil and contribute to mental health struggles.

The transgender community faces unique sufferings during their formative years, primarily due to societal pressures to conform to a binary understanding of gender. The challenges encompass societal expectations, discrimination, lack of visibility, and struggles with body dysphoria. Creating a more inclusive and understanding environment, fostering education on diverse gender identities, and providing accessible support can significantly alleviate the suffering faced by transgender individuals while growing up.

Contemporary psychoanalytical schools of thought like, queer theory and the trans movement have significantly contributed to understanding the challenges faced by transgender youth in exploring and expressing their authentic gender identity. Queer theory, in particular, has provided a framework for challenging the hegemony of heteronormative structures and ideologies that perpetuate the understanding of gender, sex, and sexual identities as fixed and unchangeable.

By focusing on the notions of sex and sexuality, queer theory legitimizes marginalized sexual identities and suggests a more complicated explanation of gender and sexuality, going beyond the limit of feminism that emphasizes gender identity. Queer theory argues that gender identity cannot be merely reduced to an opposition between men and women, but rather encompasses a wide spectrum of subjectivities that are not necessarily identifiable with the term 'man' or 'woman'. This approach also suggests that it is not possible to define an individual's gender based on such individuals not belonging to the opposite gender, but rather gender must be considered as a social act that an individual of either sex can perform. (Piantato, 2016)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on queer theory has shed light on the ways in which cultural norms around gender and sexuality intersect to regulate individuals' lives. Sedgwick argues that the binary understanding of gender and sexuality as either/or categories overlooks the fluidity and complexity of human experiences. For transgender youth, the binary gender system imposes rigid expectations that may not align with their lived experiences or sense of self. This discrepancy can lead to feelings of alienation, shame, and internal conflict as they navigate their identities in a world that often fails to recognize or validate their existence.

The trans movement has been instrumental in advocating for the rights and recognition of transgender individuals, challenging the binary gender order and heteronormativity that puts heterosexuality in a hegemonic position with regard to homosexuality, seen as a deviation from the norm. (Piantato, 2016) The movement has also contributed to the development of queer ethics, which argues for fostering positive mindsets toward non-binary gender, genderqueer, and gender ambiguity, moving beyond tolerance or a reduction in prejudice for pre-established minority (trans) identities. (Nicholas, 2018)

Queer theory and the trans movement have significantly contributed to understanding the challenges faced by transgender youth in exploring and expressing their authentic gender identity. (Nicholas, 2018) By challenging the hegemony of heteronormative structures and ideologies, legitimizing marginalized sexual identities, and advocating for the rights and recognition of transgender individuals, these perspectives have provided a framework for fostering positive attitudes and enabling social contexts for gender queerness.

Both Freud and Lacan suggest that forcing individuals to conform to a specific gender can have profound implications for mental health.

The internal conflicts, repression of authentic identity, and discordance between the self and societal expectations may contribute to a range of psychological challenges. Understanding these psychoanalytic perspectives can inform discussions on the importance of embracing diverse gender identities and fostering environments that support authentic self-expression for the well-being of individuals.

4.1 Freudian Analysis of Tobia's Gender Journey

Freud's concept of the id, representing primal instincts and desires, can be applied to Tobia's narrative to uncover internal conflicts arising from societal expectations. Freud posited that the id operates on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification. In "The Ego and the Id," Freud wrote, "The id, the whole person, represents an instinctual trend whose goal is of bringing about an increase of tension in the mind." Tobia's struggles may reflect the tension between their authentic desires and the societal pressure to conform to traditional gender norms, leading to internal conflicts that impact mental well-being.

"I voluntarily cut off my friendships with Paige and Katie. I stopped wearing the cute shorts I loved. I stopped being vocal or outspoken around the neighborhood kids. I stopped spending time with kids my own age almost altogether. I played video games with my neighbors every now and then, but I remember spending day after day reading alone in my room or longingly watching the other kids bike up and down our road." (Tobia, 2019, p. 46)

The excerpt from Jacob Tobia's narrative illustrates a profound shift in behaviour and self-expression, providing insights into the impact of societal expectations on their gender journey. From a Freudian perspective, particularly in terms of the id, ego, and superego dynamics, Tobia's voluntary withdrawal from friendships and changes in self-presentation indicates internal conflicts and the influence of the superego, which embodies societal norms.

In Freudian terms, the id represents primal instincts and desires, seeking immediate gratification. Tobia's past self, characterized by wearing "cute shorts" and being vocal and outspoken, aligns with the id's pursuit of authentic self-expression. However, the excerpt suggests a shift in behaviour, influenced by the superego, as Tobia "voluntarily cut off" friendships and altered their appearance to conform to perceived societal expectations. The superego, functioning as an internalized moral compass shaped by societal norms, family values, and cultural standards, plays a crucial role in Freudian psychoanalysis. Tobia's decision to conform by altering their clothing choices and social behaviour can be interpreted as a manifestation of the superego's influence. The superego, often associated with the father figure, as Freud noted, may have compelled Tobia to adhere to conventional gender norms, leading to a suppression of their authentic self-expression. (Fromm, 1956) The withdrawal from friendships and reduced interaction with peers, especially those of the same age, can be viewed through the lens of Freud's psychosexual stages which is mentioned in Erich Fromm's *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx and Social Psychology*. The latency stage, typically occurring between the ages of six and puberty, involves suppression of sexual impulses and a focus on developing social and cognitive skills. Tobia's retreat from social engagement may reflect a response to the challenges presented by their evolving gender identity during this developmental stage. The longing to engage with other kids while reading alone or observing neighbourhood activities from a distance highlights the conflict between the id's desire for connection and authentic self-expression and the superego's imposition of societal norms. Freud's conceptualization of the psyche suggests that these internal struggles can contribute to psychological distress, influencing Tobia's emotional well-being during this period of their gender journey.

These lines from the text unveil the intricate dynamics between the id, ego, and superego. The shift in behaviour, withdrawal from friendships, and altered self-presentation can be interpreted as manifestations of internal conflicts, shaped by societal expectations and the superego's influence. In Freudian psychoanalysis, internal conflicts arise when the individual experiences a clash between instinctual desires, societal norms, and the superego's moral standards. Tobia's voluntary withdrawal from friendships, alteration of personal style, and shift in social behaviour suggest a response to the internal conflict rooted in societal expectations regarding gender. The passage underscores the impact of the superego, which internalizes cultural and moral norms, leading Tobia to modify their behaviour as a defense against potential societal disapproval.

The cessation of interactions with friends and the altered wardrobe can be seen as forms of defence mechanisms. Freud identified defence mechanisms as psychological strategies employed by the ego to protect itself from anxiety arising from internal conflicts. Tobia's decision to conform to societal expectations by distancing themselves from friends and modifying their clothing choices may represent a form of repression or sublimation, mechanisms that serve to alleviate the internal tension caused by the clash between authentic desires and societal norms. The act of spending days reading alone or watching other kids from a distance might be indicative of Tobia's attempt to navigate their internal conflict through withdrawal and observation. Freudian theory suggests that individuals employ defence mechanisms to manage internal conflicts, and Tobia's choice to engage in solitary activities can be interpreted as a coping strategy to avoid potential judgment and maintain a semblance of internal equilibrium, also described as "the splitting of ego as a response to defense." (Freud, 1940).

Additionally, Freud's exploration of the superego, the internalized moral standards and societal expectations, is pertinent to Tobia's narrative. The superego can exert significant pressure when individuals are compelled to conform to specific gender norms. Freud stated, "The super-ego retains the character of the father." Tobia's narrative may be analysed through the lens of the superego, considering how societal expectations, symbolized by the father figure, influence their gender identity and contribute to the internal conflicts described in the book.

"His silence smolders a moment longer, burning with heat and pressure and intensity. He finally speaks. Processors whirring, I

listen. "You'll always be my son, but if you choose this lifestyle, I want no part of it." Processing. Processing . . . "If you choose to be with a man, he will never be my son-in-law." Processing . . . "If you choose to adopt children, they will never be my grandchildren." Processing . . . "This is not a choice I agree with. This is not a choice I will ever approve." Overwhelmed, my processor shut down. Rainbow wheel of death. Spinning, spinning, spinning. Survival mode enabled." (Tobia, 2019)

These lines from the book reflect a poignant moment in which the father's response becomes a powerful representation of societal expectations and influences on Tobia's gender identity. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the father figure is symbolically significant in shaping the superego, reflecting societal norms and values. In Tobia's narrative, the father's explicit disapproval of Tobia's potential choices regarding their gender identity and lifestyle is a manifestation of the superego's influence.

The father's statement, "You'll always be my son, but if you choose this lifestyle, I want no part of it," highlights the clash between Tobia's authentic self-expression and the societal expectations represented by the father. Janet Mock talks about a similar experience in her book, *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*, "To my father, I was a sissy, and he tried his hardest to squash my femininity the only ways he knew how: intimidation and fear" (p. 31) The superego, as articulated by the fathers in both the scenarios, becomes a powerful force that seeks to regulate Tobia's choices, particularly in the realm of gender and relationships. The rejection of the possibility of Tobia having a same-sex partner or adopting children underscores the societal norms embedded in the father's superego. The father's disapproval becomes a direct reflection of the societal expectations regarding conventional gender roles, relationships, and family structures. Tobia's internal processing, represented by the metaphor of a spinning rainbow wheel and the activation of survival mode, suggests the overwhelming nature of these conflicts with societal expectations.

Freud's assertion that "The super-ego retains the character of the father" aligns with Tobia's narrative, queer theory has engaged with the concept of the superego in Freudian analysis, particularly in relation to the father figure and societal norms. The superego is seen as a symbolic representation of societal norms, including those related to gender expression and identity. The intense internal conflict experienced by individuals who navigate gender identities that diverge from societal expectations can be understood through the Freudian lens of the superego and its role in regulating gender expression. (Mulaj, 2019) The intense internal conflict, portrayed by Tobia's overwhelmed processor and survival mode, underscores the psychological toll of navigating a gender identity that diverges from societal expectations. This passage sheds light on the intricate interplay between individual identity and societal influences, emphasizing how the father's disapproval becomes a manifestation of the superego's role in regulating gender expression. Tobia's narrative, analysed through the Freudian lens, invites readers to contemplate the internal conflicts faced by individuals who navigate divergent gender identities within the framework of societal expectations symbolized by the father figure.

Erik Erikson, a prominent psychoanalyst and developmental psychologist, integrated socio-cultural elements into his psychosocial theory of human development. While he did not explicitly use the terms id, ego, and superego, his work encompassed the concept of internalization of societal norms and the influence of the father figure within the broader context of identity development. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development include the concept of the "Identity vs. Role Confusion" stage during adolescence. In this stage, individuals grapple with questions of identity and seek to establish a sense of self. The process of identity formation involves internalizing societal norms, values, and expectations. Erikson emphasizes the importance of a positive resolution in this stage for the development of a strong sense of identity. He writes in *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, "Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of fidelity, or the ability to live by society's standards and expectations" (Erikson, 1968). The influence of the father figure is implicit in Erikson's model, particularly in the earlier stages where trust and autonomy are established. The "Generativity vs. Stagnation" stage, occurring in adulthood, also reflects the integration of societal norms and the role of the father in shaping generative contributions to society. Erikson notes in *Childhood and Society*, "Generativity, in its truest form, involves a concern for establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson, 1950).

While Erikson did not explicitly use Freudian terms, his emphasis on the internalization of societal norms and the role of the father aligns with Freud's notion of the superego as a repository of cultural and moral values. Erikson's psychosocial theory offers a more expansive perspective by considering the broader socio-cultural context and the lifelong process of identity development, encompassing the influence of societal norms and the character of the father across various stages of life.

A Freudian analysis of Jacob Tobia's gender journey in *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* reveals a complex interplay of internal conflicts, societal pressures, and developmental influences. Drawing on Freud's key concepts and engaging with secondary sources like Erikson's work enriches the understanding of Tobia's experiences within the psychoanalytic framework. The tensions between the id, ego, superego, and psychosexual stages illuminate the intricate layers of Tobia's journey and contribute to discussions surrounding gender identity and mental health.

4.2 Lacanian Analysis of Gender Construction in *Sissy: A Coming-Of-Gender Story*

Jacob Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-Of-Gender Story* offers a compelling narrative that can be analysed through a Lacanian lens, exploring how gender construction is shaped by symbolic and psychoanalytic processes. Jacques Lacan, a psychoanalyst, introduced concepts such as the Mirror Stage and the Symbolic Order, which provide valuable frameworks for understanding the complexities of gender identity.

The Symbolic Order, a key Lacanian concept, represents the realm of language, culture, and societal norms that shape subjectivity. In Tobia's narrative, the Symbolic Order is evident in the societal expectations and norms that influence their understanding of gender. The pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, as depicted in interactions with family and societal figures, reflects the impact of the Symbolic Order on Tobia's gender construction.

“Their words obliterated whatever sense of courage I had and conjured within me a recollection of the ever-pervasive presence of masculine expectation. The word “faggot” kept ringing in my ears and, before I quite knew what was going on, I realized that my room had shrunk to the size of a closet. With each successive “thump” of the football hitting a wall and with each verbal expression of masculine dominion, a multitude of closet doors were slammed in my face... They were the doors of fluid sexuality, of ominous white privilege, of pervasive masculinity, of continual and sustained affluence, of reformed gender identity, of under-the-rug misogyny, of flawed moral principle... chipping away at the supposedly infallible obelisk of societal expectation.” (Tobia, 2019)

The quoted passage from Jacob Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-Of-Gender Story* reflects a profound internal struggle and the impact of societal expectations, particularly those associated with masculinity and gender norms. Analysing these lines through Lacan's concept of the Symbolic Order provides insights into how language, societal structures, and cultural expectations shape the subject's experience of identity.

The use of derogatory language such as “faggot” represents the intrusion of societal norms and expectations into Tobia's psyche. The repetition of the word echoes the pervasive influence of the Symbolic Order, as language becomes a tool for enforcing societal norms related to gender and sexuality. The metaphor of Tobia's room shrinking to the size of a closet carries significant Lacanian implications. The confinement within a shrinking space symbolizes the constriction of identity within societal expectations, particularly those associated with masculinity. The “thump” of the football hitting the wall becomes a symbolic reinforcement of masculine dominance, echoing Lacan's emphasis on the Symbolic Order's role in perpetuating normative structures.

The slamming of closet doors serves as a powerful metaphor for the closing off of various aspects of identity within the Symbolic Order. Each door represents different facets of Tobia's identity, such as fluid sexuality, white privilege, masculinity, affluence, gender identity, and misogyny. Lacan would argue that these doors represent symbolic categories imposed by societal discourse, limiting the potential for authentic self-expression and reinforcing normative expectations.

The mention of “societal expectation” as an “infallible obelisk” highlights the imposing and rigid nature of the Symbolic Order. The term “obelisk” implies a monumental, unyielding structure that dictates societal norms. The chipping away at this obelisk reflects Tobia's internal struggle against the societal expectations embedded in the Symbolic Order, as they attempt to navigate and challenge the normative constructs placed upon them.

The quoted lines from the text vividly illustrate the intrusion of the Symbolic Order into Tobia's experience of identity. The use of derogatory language, the metaphor of shrinking space, and the symbolism of slamming closet doors provide a poignant portrayal of the constraints imposed by societal expectations. Lacan's concept of the Symbolic Order helps elucidate how language, cultural norms, and societal structures shape the individual's understanding of self and contribute to the internal conflicts depicted in Tobia's narrative.

Judith Butler, a prominent figure in gender and queer theory, engages with Lacanian concepts, particularly the Symbolic Order, in her exploration of performativity and the construction of identity. Butler's work challenges fixed categories within the Symbolic Order by emphasizing the performative nature of gender, suggesting that identity is not inherent but rather enacted through repeated and culturally prescribed behaviours.

The passage vividly portrays Tobia's encounter with the Symbolic Order, where societal norms and expectations, particularly those associated with masculinity, become performative acts that shape their experience of identity. Butler's concept of performativity aligns with the symbolic nature of language and societal norms within the Symbolic Order. According to an article titled “Fatal Violence Against the Transgender and Gender-Expansive Community in 2020” by the HRC Foundation (2020) at least 45 transgender or gender-expansive people were fatally shot or killed by other violent means, the majority of whom were Black and Latine transgender women. These incidents often go unreported or misrepresented, contributing to a culture of violence and discrimination against transgender individuals. Derogatory terms and language can delay awareness of these incidents and contribute to a lack of respect for transgender and gender-expansive people in both life and death. In addition to violence and discrimination, transgender individuals also face barriers in accessing healthcare and employment. A study on the experiences of transgender individuals in the workplace found that one in eight trans employees have been physically attacked by colleagues or customers in the last year, and half of trans and non-binary people have hidden or disguised their LGBT identity at work due to fear of discrimination. Employers can take steps to support trans employees, including developing clear zero-tolerance policies on transphobic bullying, discrimination, and harassment, and providing all-staff training on these policies.

Butler states in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance.” The repetition of derogatory language in Tobia's narrative reflects the performative acts that contribute to the appearance of a gendered identity within the Symbolic Order.

The metaphor of the room shrinking, and the slamming of closet doors aligns with Butler's idea that gender identity is enacted through repeated acts. The closing of closet doors can be seen as a performative act of restricting and confining various facets of identity within normative categories. Butler's conception of performativity allows us to interpret Tobia's experiences not merely as the result of societal norms but as ongoing acts that construct and reinforce gendered subjectivities within the Symbolic Order.

The passage from Tobia's narrative and Butler's ideas converge in highlighting the performative nature of identity within the Symbolic Order. The impact of language, societal expectations, and the enactment of gender roles are central to both perspectives. Butler's emphasis on the repeated acts that produce the appearance of identity provides a theoretical framework to understand Tobia's negotiation with societal norms and the performative construction of their gender identity within the Symbolic Order.

5. Conclusion

This paper delves into the intricate nuances of Tobia's gender journey through the lens of psychoanalytical frameworks, particularly those proposed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. The exploration of Tobia's experiences, as vividly depicted in *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story*, unveils the complex interplay between internal conflicts, societal expectations, and the construction of gender identity.

The psychoanalytical lens employed in this paper has illuminated how Tobia grapples with internal conflicts rooted in societal norms, familial expectations, and the search for authentic self-expression. Freudian concepts such as the id, ego, and superego have been instrumental in understanding Tobia's negotiation between instinctual desires and societal demands, while Lacanian ideas, including the Mirror Stage and the Symbolic Order, have enriched the analysis of identity construction within a cultural and linguistic context.

The examination of Tobia's narrative has revealed the profound impact of societal expectations on the individual psyche, showcasing moments of repression, defence mechanisms, and the perpetual negotiation with normative structures. The paper has shed light on Tobia's resilience, challenging societal norms and contributing to the broader discourse on gender nonconformity, identity, and the quest for authenticity.

As this psychoanalytical reading unfolded, secondary sources from scholars such as Judith Butler, Nancy Chodorow, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Erik Erikson have provided valuable insights, reinforcing and expanding upon Freudian and Lacanian perspectives. The incorporation of these sources has contributed to a nuanced understanding of Tobia's gender journey, connecting individual experiences to broader psychoanalytical discourses on gender, identity, and societal expectations.

In essence, this paper underscores the significance of psychoanalysis in unravelling the complexities of gender identity, revealing how Tobia's narrative becomes a microcosm through which broader societal issues are refracted. By engaging with the psychoanalytical frameworks of Freud and Lacan, this paper not only elucidates Tobia's experiences but also contributes to the ongoing conversation surrounding gender, identity, and the continual evolution of psychoanalytical thought in contemporary discourse. Ultimately, Tobia's journey serves as a compelling case study that invites further exploration, reflection, and dialogue within the realms of psychoanalysis, gender studies, and the pursuit of a more inclusive understanding of the human psyche.

Acknowledgments

I am thankful for the support and guidance of my supervisor, Dr. K. Maragathavel.

Authors contributions

Sara Eliana Kuriakose was responsible for the data collection and drafting of the manuscript. Dr. K. Maragathavel was responsible for proofreading it.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

- Abraham, K. (1909). *Dreams and Myths: A Study in Race Psychology*. Creative Media Partners.
- Avenue, H. R. W. | 350 F., York, 34th F. | N., & t 1.212.290.4700, N. 10118-3299 U. |. (2016, March 23). "Do You See How Much I'm Suffering Here?" | *Abuse against Transgender Women in US Immigration Detention*. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/03/23/do-you-see-how-much-im-suffering-here/abuse-against-transgender-women-us>
- Brenner, C. (1974). *An elementary textbook of psychoanalysis*. Doubleday.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. University Of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520924086>
- Chodorow, N. J. (1999). *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender; and Culture*. Yale University Press.
- Elliot, P. (2014). Psychoanalysis. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1(1-2), 165-168. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399920>
- Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and Society*. Vintage Digital.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W.W. Norton & Co.
- Fatal Violence Against the Transgender and Gender-Expansive Community in 2020*. (n.d.). Human Rights Campaign. Retrieved from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-trans-and-gender-expansive-community-in-2020>
- Freud, S. (1905). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Verso. Retrieved from https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_SE_Three_Essays_complete.pdf
- Freud, S. (1923). The Ego And The Id . *TACD Journal*, 17(1), 5-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1046171x.1989.12034344>
- Freud, S. (1940). Splitting of the ego in the process of defense. In J. Strachey (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 23. London: Hogarth, 271-278. Fromm, E. (1956). *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx and Social Psychology*. Open Road Media.
- Gherovici, P. (2011). Psychoanalysis Needs a Sex Change. *Gay & Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*, 7(1).
- Gherovici, P. (2017). *Transgender Psychoanalysis: A Lacanian Perspective on Sexual Difference*. Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315745107>
- Goffman, E. (1979). *Gender Advertisements*. Proquest.
- Lacan, J. (1973). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Le Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (2021). *The Object Relation. Book IV, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (A. Price, Trans.). Polity Press.
- Mitchell, J. (1974). *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis*. Penguin.
- Mock, J. (2014). *Redefining realness : my path to womanhood, identity, love & so much more*. Simon & Schuster.
- Mulaj, J. (2019). A Critique of Queer Phenomenology: Gender and the Sexual. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 20(3), 189-203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2019.1641946>
- Nicholas, L. (2018). Queer ethics and fostering positive mindsets toward non-binary gender, genderqueer, and gender ambiguity. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 20(2-3), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2018.1505576>
- Piantato, G. (2016). How has queer theory influenced the ways we think about gender? *Working Paper of Public Health*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.4081/wpph.2016.6948>
- Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822390442>
- Sigmund, F. (1899). *The Interpretation Of Dreams*. Flame Tree Publishing.
- Sigmund, F. (1920). *Beyond the pleasure principle*. Hogarth Press.
- Tavris, C. (1992). *Mismeasure of Woman: Why Women are Not the Better Sex, the Inferior Sex, or the Opposite Sex*. Simon & Schuster.
- Tobia, J. (2019). *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story*. Penguin.
- Violet, M. (2018). *Yes, You Are Trans Enough : My Transition from Self-loathing to Self-love*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Werner-Larsen, L. K. (2014). *Gender as compromise formation : towards a radical psychoanalytic theory of trans**. Retrieved from

<https://scholarworks.smith.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1888&context=theses>

Whitebook, J. (2017). *Freud: An Intellectual Biography*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139025119>

Yurcaba, J. (2022, August 3). "Social contagion" isn't causing more youths to be transgender, study finds. NBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-health-and-wellness/social-contagion-isnt-causing-youths-transgender-study-finds-rcna41392>