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The Psychosocial Spectrum Of Trans Women Enduring Suppression Of Gender Identity Due To Internalised Cissexism In Select Indian Narratives

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Abstract

Amidst the most oppressed people worldwide, gender minorities endure every-day discrimination based on their appearances and behaviors while grappling with numerous obstacles. The crisis regarding gender identity that many transgender individuals face stems from the dominant societal framework of gender dichotomy. Society largely acknowledges only two gender categories: male and female, consistently neglecting other identities. This deeply ingrained gender binarism is firmly established in cultural traditions and serves as the primary drive of the discrimination faced by transgender individuals. As a result, the suppression of their identities often starts early in life, compelling many to hide their true selves and authentic instincts. This internal struggle is intensified by societal attitudes toward gender. Trans Indian authors such as Revathi, Living Smile Vidya, and Laxminarayan Tripathi delve into their experiences of growing up within a cisnormative environment, where their true selves frequently clashed with the expectations placed upon them. This conflict between self-identity and societal perception is a recurring theme that influences their experiences throughout different phases of life. Another significant theme is resilience. Despite encountering systemic discrimination, social rejection, and both physical and emotional abuse, these writers emerge as powerful advocates for transgender rights, confronting the oppressive systems that attempt to marginalize their community.

Index Terms: gender trajectory, suppression of identity, social construct, gender binarism, gender minorities, internalised cissexism etc.

Introduction

Contemporary concepts such as ‘gender fluidity’, ‘transgender’, and ‘transsexuals’ only began to appear following the 1950s, with transgender studies gaining traction after the 1990s. In the Indian subcontinent, the

term 'hijras' refers to trans women. According to the 2011 census, there are approximately half a million hijras in India, who have been legally recognized as a third gender within gender classifications. In 2014, the Union of India granted fundamental rights under Article 21, aiming to protect hijras from discrimination and societal injustices they typically face. Given that binarism is deeply entrenched in culture and society, the stigmatization of the third gender has proliferated alongside it. These individuals frequently encounter challenges related to social stigma and discrimination, relegating them to the status of sexual minorities who experience various forms of social injustice in their everyday lives. Consequently, their education, job opportunities, healthcare access, and other basic needs are jeopardized. The societal stigma directed at them can be characterized as 'transmisia', which denotes a specific type of prejudice and animosity aimed at transgender individuals.

Background of the Study

Transmisia manifests in multiple ways, such as the stigmatization or harm directed at people based on their appearance and behavior. It fundamentally invalidates the identity of individuals grappling with "gender dysphoria." This devaluation leads to treating them as less human or deserving of respect. For example, labeling transgender individuals with derogatory names or implementing healthcare policies that exclude them from benefits exemplifies transmisia. Moreover, media representation of trans women often depicts them as inauthentic, deviant, or merely as objects for others' pleasure. It was not until the 1990s that researchers and academics began to uncover the hardships faced by trans individuals, highlighting the internalization of transphobia within society.

Articulating Trans Identity Suppression due to Transmisia

The crisis of gender identity among transgender people arises from the societal construct of gender dichotomy dominant in our culture. Society recognizes only two gender categories—male and female—overlooking the spectrum of other identities. Therefore, the concept of binarism is entrenched in societal norms, culture, and traditions, leading to the difficulties faced by these individuals. This results in the suppression of their true identity from a young age. Often, they are compelled to hide their true selves and inherent instincts. Their natural biological responses lead them to adopt societal gender expectations.

Gender Binarism is a social Construct based on the idea that society has only two genders-feminine and masculine-which are assigned at birth. These correspond to the sex assigned at birth. . . This practice and hierarchical organization system implies that everyone must be categorized, or categorize themselves. (EL Pais, Gender binarism, binarism, genderism)

Social constructionism posits various aspects of social reality, including social concepts, beliefs, norms, and values, which are shaped through discourse, negotiations, and interactions. Society's members are frequently influenced by social conventions and structures, which are collectively developed, maintained, and shaped by their social environments, though they lack empirical validation. Compared to individuals who identify as cisgender, transgender individuals encounter significantly more discrimination and stigma from society, compelling them to conceal their identities. This phenomenon is a direct consequence of the deep-seated gender binarism rooted in culture and tradition, forcing trans individuals to face numerous severe challenges that lead them to internalize the societal transphobia directed at them.

Discussion and Interpretation

Due to societal negligence, individuals become victims of a gender dichotomy that is perpetuated in various ways. The internalization that occurs in the minds of trans individuals leads them to hide their genuine

identity alongside their traumatic experiences, which are often conditioned in their unconscious minds. While Aristotle discusses aspects of psychoanalysis, it was Sigmund Freud who first introduced the theory of psychoanalysis, focusing on the functioning of the three states of the mind. In his work, "The Interpretations of Dreams," he examines the interplay of the id, the ego, and the superego. Transgender individuals experience the internal trauma of "Suppression" as a result of societal conditioning regarding gender dichotomy, which leads to stigma within society.

Critics of Freud's theories argue that his emphasis on sexual matters and unconscious conflicts may overlook other crucial factors in identity formation, such as cognitive, social, and cultural influences. Nevertheless, Freud's contributions remain a foundational framework for investigating the psychological aspects of identity suppression. By integrating Freud's insights with contemporary discoveries in developmental psychology, neuroscience, and cultural studies, a more comprehensive understanding of the issue emerges.

Freud's concept of the superego, which encompasses the internalized moral standards and societal expectations, is vital for grasping identity suppression of trans individuals. As the superego gains increasing authority at this stage, adolescents become more sensitive to societal judgments and moral oversight, as this mental framework differentiates right from wrong and evokes feelings of guilt when one falters. This heightened awareness can lead to self-censorship and the suppression of desires or traits deemed unacceptable by the superego. For instance, an individual who adopts societal prejudices regarding certain behaviors or identities may bury their authentic feelings to adhere to perceived norms, resulting in internal conflict and a fragmented sense of self (Freud 59). As a result, they may internalize cissexism and conceal their true identities.

These unresolved conflicts can lead to identity suppression of trans individuals and compelled to fulfill parental expectations or to suppress feelings of resentment, attraction, or defiance that arise within these circumstances. Transgender people are particularly aware of the pressures imposed by their social surroundings, which can heighten identity suppression. Cultural norms regarding gender roles, sexual activities, and career aspirations often exert significant pressure on adolescents, compelling them to conform even when such expectations conflict with their authentic selves. For example, a trans teen raised in a conservative environment might hide their passion for unconventional career paths or non-heteronormative relationships to avoid social exclusion. Freud's recognition of the interplay between individual psychology and social structures underscores the complexity of "suppression" as a phenomenon that exists both internally and externally.

Trans individuals frequently conceal or suppress their identities to escape transmisia, which is illustrated in the narratives of trans women who reflect on the dichotomy and painful experiences that have shaped their lives. Society, including their family members, often fails to recognize them for who they truly are, which forces them to endure suffering as they suppress their identities, as Revathi shows in *Truth About Me*:

I experienced changes in my body and in my being. I experienced a growing sense of irreplaceable femaleness, which haunted me, day in and day out. A woman trapped in man's body was how I thought of myself. But how could that be? I longed to be known as a woman and felt pain at being considered a man. (Revathi 15)

Transgender memoirs are crucial in conveying the struggles and anguish experienced by sexual minorities, serving as a platform for them to express their previously suppressed identities. Living Smile Vidya, a notable member of the transgender community, shares the internal pain of suppression she endured due to enforced suppression in her autobiography, *I am Vidya as*,

No, I couldn't live any longer as a man, I could not become a woman, I'd rather die. I wasn't confused now. I have come to a clear decision, and it burst out into words. Suicide had been an option in my mind over the past few days. I buried my head in Sri's lap and broke into sobs. My decision was firm and bold. I hated being a man. I was going to try and live as a woman. If I failed, I was ready to die. (Vidya 56)

For transgender people, this period presents significant challenges, as their internal sense of gender often clashes with society's expectations. The felt profound alienation and confusion as the body transforms in ways that did not correspond with her internal identity as said by Laxmi in her narrative *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*: "When I looked in the mirror, I saw someone unfamiliar. My body was changing in ways that felt alien, yet my heart knew who I was meant to be" (Tripathi 65). Laxmi's efforts to embody masculinity by suppressing her true self left her feeling estranged and fragmented: "I tried to act like the boy society wanted me to be, but it felt like wearing an ill-fitting costume" (Tripathi 67).

The suppression of her authentic self illustrates how societal pressures can hinder individuality and perpetuate damaging binaries. She remembers joining sports teams and engaging in activities intended to promote masculinity. "I thought if I could just fit in, the teasing would stop," she writes. "But the harder I tried, the more I felt I was losing myself" (Tripathi 64). This endeavor to conform to societal norms, while understandable, only deepened her internal struggle and exacerbated the discord between her true self and her outward actions. Throughout the selected memoirs, transgender individuals have endured the humiliations that have been imposed upon them which Vidya articulates in her narrative *I am Vidya* as,

A transgender by a society that divides and defines itself as men and women in terms of biology alone from spurned by her family, to begging on the streets as a social outcast; from donning a woman's clothes, to undergoing excruciating surgery to lose her 'manhood' from suffering emotional and physical harassment, to arriving at her true identity. (Book Cover, *I am Vidya*)

In today's avant-garde society, the absence of understanding regarding trans individuals and gender diversity forces them to conceal their genuine identities, resulting in psychological distress throughout various aspects of their lives. Given that the binary view of gender is firmly entrenched in society, it is essential to grasp the relativist viewpoint on inclusivity and non-binary perspectives. This memoir functions as both a personal story and a significant commentary on the societal and institutional obstacles encountered by transgender individuals.

Conclusion

By highlighting the systemic exclusion present in legal systems, cultural attitudes, and healthcare structures, the writers draw attention to the urgent need for change. Their bold affirmation of identity confronts rigid binaries and fosters an environment for various expressions of gender, aligning with Freud's Suppression as a defense mechanism. Through the narratives, the writers elevate the voices of marginalized groups and encourage readers to examine their own prejudices. Their memoir serves not only as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit but also as a call to action for increased understanding, acceptance, and equality.

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