

**THE POSTTRANSSEXUAL TURN:
A CRITIQUE OF SELECT 21ST CENTURY AMERICAN TRANS
LIFE NARRATIVES**

*Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature*

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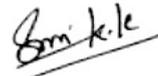
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DECLARATION

I, **Sonima K. K.**, hereby declare that this thesis titled, “**The Posttranssexual Turn: A Critique of Select 21st Century American Trans Life Narratives**” is an authentic record of the research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr Rajani B., Associate Professor and Principal, The Zamorin’s Guruvayurappan College, Kozhikode, and it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**The Posttranssexual Turn: A Critique of Select 21st Century American Trans Life Narratives**" submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language & Literature is a bona fide record of the studies and research carried out by **Ms. Sonima K. K.** under my supervision and this research work has not previously formed the basis of award for any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar titles or recognition.

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate the process of trans becoming and trans identity construction in the select 21st century American trans life narratives. The objective of the study is to problematise the nuances in the construction of the 21st century American trans subjectivity pertaining to the notions of gender identity, corporeality, and desire. This research tackles issues related to the problematic representation of gender essentialism and transnormativity in the early American trans life narratives and examines the subsequent shift towards a post-structuralist reconceptualization of these concepts in the 21st century. The study investigates the posttranssexual negation of gender binary and stereotyping, the wrong body model of trans subjectivity and heterosexual hegemony in the select texts to evaluate their potential as transformative and reverse discourse using textual analysis and auto/biography method as research tools. Based on an analysis of select 21st century American trans life narratives written by Kate Bornstein, Jamison Greene, Janet Mock, Jacob Tobia, and Meredith Talusan, the research concludes that these texts function as reverse discourse and challenge heteronormative hegemony. Unlike the classical stories of gender migration that promoted transnormativity, these life narratives are representative of the emergence of a novel gender paradigm aimed at challenging the conventional heteronormative agenda and reconfiguring its norms within the realm of trans identity politics. There is a post-structuralist reconceptualization of biological essentialism, gender identity and role as well as sexuality evident in these narratives that question the absurdity of the reinvigoration and reappropriation of heteronormativity in trans identity construction.

Keywords: Posttranssexual, Performativity, Trans, Reverse Discourse, Heterosexual Matrix, Wrong Body Model

സംഗ്രഹം

ഇരുപത്തൊന്നാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിലെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത അമേരിക്കൻ ട്രാൻസ് ജീവിത ആഖ്യാനങ്ങളിൽ പ്രതാപാഭിചിരിക്കുന്ന ലിംഗസ്വത്വ നിർമ്മാണത്തിന്റെ വ്യത്യസ്ത തലങ്ങളെ അന്വേഷണ വിധേയമാക്കുക എന്നതാണ് ഈ ഗവേഷണത്തിന്റെ ലക്ഷ്യം. പ്രസ്തുത ട്രാൻസ് ജീവിത ആഖ്യാനങ്ങളിൽ ലിംഗസമത്വം, ലൈംഗികത, ജീവശാസ്ത്രപരമായ ശാരീരിക അവസ്ഥ എന്നിവ ട്രാൻസ് വ്യക്തിത്വ നിർമ്മാണത്തെ എങ്ങിനെ നിർവചിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് കണ്ടെത്താൻ ഈ ഗവേഷണം ലക്ഷ്യമിടുന്നു. ആദ്യകാല അമേരിക്കൻ ട്രാൻസ് ജീവിത ആഖ്യാനങ്ങളിൽ കണ്ടുവന്ന ട്രാൻസ് നോർമാറ്റിവിറ്റിയെ പ്രശ്നവൽക്കരിക്കുന്നതോടൊപ്പം ഇരുപത്തൊന്നാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിൽ ഈ ആശയങ്ങളുടെ പുനർനിർമ്മാണത്തിലേക്കുള്ള മാറ്റത്തെ ഈ പഠനം വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. ടെക്സ്ചൽ അനാലിസിസ്, ഓട്ടോ ബയോഗ്രഫി മെത്തേഡ് എന്നീ ഗവേഷണ രീതികൾ ഈ പഠനത്തിനായി ഉപയോഗിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു. തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത ട്രാൻസ് ജീവിത ആഖ്യാനങ്ങളുടെ വിശകലനത്തെ അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കി കേറ്റ് ബോൺസ്റ്റൺ, ജാമിസൺ ഗ്രീൻ, ജാനറ്റ് മോക്ക്, ജേക്കബ് റോബിയ, മെറിഡിത്ത് റ്റാലൂസൺ എന്നിവർ എങ്ങിനെ തങ്ങളുടെ ആത്മകഥകളിലും ഓർമ്മക്കുറിപ്പുകളിലും ജെൻഡർ ബൈനറി, ഹെറ്ററോസെക്ഷ്വൽ ഹെജിമണി, ലിംഗപരമായ വാർപ്പുമാതൃകകൾ എന്നിവയെ ചോദ്യം ചെയ്യുന്നു എന്നും അതിലൂടെ ഒരു പോസ്റ്റ്ട്രാൻസ്സെക്ഷ്വൽ പ്രത്യയശാസ്ത്രത്തോട് നീതി പുലർത്തു എന്നും ഈ പഠനം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. ഈ എഴുത്തുകാർ പരമ്പരാഗത ഹെറ്ററോ നോർമാറ്റിവ് അജണ്ടയെ വെല്ലുവിളിക്കുന്നതായും ട്രാൻസ് സ്വത്വ രാഷ്ട്രീയത്തെ പുനർനിർവചിക്കാൻ ലക്ഷ്യമിട്ടുള്ള ഒരു ലിംഗ മാതൃകയും സ്വത്വ രാഷ്ട്രീയവും മുന്നോട്ടു വെക്കുന്നതായും ഈ പഠനം നിഗമനം ചെയ്യുന്നു.

പ്രധാന വാക്കുകൾ: പോസ്റ്റ്ട്രാൻസ്സെക്ഷ്വൽ, പെർഫോമറ്റിവിറ്റി, റിവേഴ്സ് ഡിസ്കോഴ്സ്, ഹെറ്ററോസെക്ഷ്വൽ മാട്രിക്സ്, റോങ്ങ്ബോഡി മോഡൽ.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Historical Dialogues: The Emergence of Trans Identity Discourse

Transgender studies more attuned to differences of race, location, and class, as well as to differences within gender, would provide a better view into the making of this world we all inhabit, and enable a powerful critical rereading of contemporary (post)modernity in all its complexity.

(Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledge” 15)

The 21st century has revolutionized humanity’s notions regarding gender and sexuality. It has replaced the binary structure of gender with an entire spectrum of gender identities that challenge the age-old man-woman dichotomy. But parallel to this, increased and more vigorous attempts to curb all such reverse discourses of gender have also gained momentum. On one side, the trans community is elated by their success in achieving legal and political rights. Still, on the other side, they are appalled by the increasing rate of anti-trans violence and transphobia. While the earlier modes of academic production aimed at the erasure of trans discourses, contemporary mainstream knowledge attempts to delegitimize trans existence. In this regard Vivian K. Namaste’s argument that the contemporary queer theory depicts an absolute neglect of the everyday reality of trans life points towards the need for a critical engagement with the current modes of trans depictions (9). Even within the trans discourses, there exist issues of lack of representation and double marginalization with regard to economic, social, and racial differences (Gosset et al XV). This necessitates framing different means and methods to question and rectify the problematic representations of trans identity.

Transgender studies emerged as a branch of LGBTQ studies during the

1990s'. In their "Introduction" to the first issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, the first non-medical journal about transgender studies published in 2014, Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah defined transgender studies as that which "does not merely investigate transgender phenomena as its proper object; it also treats as its archive and object of study the very practices of power/knowledge over gender-variant bodies that construct transgender people as deviant" (4). Transgender is often used to refer to people who do not conform to the existing expectations about gender. They identify themselves with and live the genders that were not assigned to them at birth or by presenting and living genders in ways that may not be readily intelligible in terms of more traditional conceptions of gender.

Used as an umbrella term, 'transgender' generally aims to group several distinct kinds of people such as transsexuals, gender-queer, drag kings and drag queens, butch lesbians, and cross-dressers. People who seek medical assistance to realign their physical attributes with their felt gender identity are often referred to as transsexuals. Like all the other sexual minorities transgender also experience oppression and marginalisation in multiple modalities (Stryker, *Transgender History* 7). The 1990s witnessed the resurgence of gender-divergent people who started claiming their agency in their self-actualization by redefining the biological, social, and cultural definitions of sex, gender, and sexuality in their favour. According to Susan Stryker,

The field of transgender studies is concerned with anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and status that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between

a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood. (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledge” 3)

Foucault in one of his lectures delivered on 7th January 1976, which was later published in his book *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, spoke about a unique phenomenon characteristic of the late 20th century. He called it an “insurrection of subjugated knowledge” (“Two Lectures” 81). Foucault says that what marked the discourse of the last fifteen years was the “local character of criticism”, an autonomous, non-centralised kind of theoretical production whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought, something that proceeds by means of “a return of knowledge” (“Two Lectures” 81). The emergence of the new gender politics initiated by the transgender community in America during the 1990s as well as elsewhere in the world was, in Foucauldian terminology, an insurrection of subjugated knowledge (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated” 12).

Foucault further explained that subjugated knowledge is of two kinds- first, it refers to “blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory and which criticism - which draws upon scholarship- has been able to reveal.” Then there is a “whole set of knowledge that has been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated naive knowledge, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (Foucault, “Two Lectures” 82). According to Foucault, the emergence of this particular, local, regional, and differential knowledge, though considered low-ranking and not so popular by the mainstream knowledge, has the

potential to disturb social structures and power systems (“Two Lectures” 82).

The emergence of transgender ideology and scholarship can thus be regarded as the rise of subjugated knowledge, a rare combination of “buried knowledges of erudition and those disqualified from the hierarchy of knowledges and sciences” (Foucault, “Two Lectures” 82). It came into being by combining the historical knowledge deliberately hidden by the power structures and the local, individual knowledge of experiencing the embodied materiality of trans subjectivity. According to Stryker and Currah,

Transgender studies does not merely . . . extend previously existing research agendas that facilitate the framing of transgender phenomena as appropriate targets of medical, legal, and psychotherapeutic intervention; rather, it draws upon the powerful contestations of normative knowledge that emerged over the course of the twentieth century from critical theory, poststructuralist and postmodernist epistemologies, postcolonial studies, cultural studies of science, and identity-based critiques of dominant cultural practices emanating from feminism, communities of colour, diasporic and displaced communities, disability studies, AIDS activism, and queer subcultures and from the lives of people interpellated as being transgender. (“Introduction” 4)

The history of the emergence of this unique and distinct discourse on trans identity politics in 1990 America was a revolutionary attempt to write the ‘history of the present’ in the Foucauldian sense. Pearce R. and others refer to this emergence as “the genealogy of trans becoming” in their article “Introduction: The Emergence of trans”. According to them, in this process of trans becoming “De-sutured from its qualifiers of gender and sexuality, the notion of ‘trans’ has cast a challenge to earlier understandings of the relationship between gender and sexuality, identity and feeling

and the question of embodied subjectivity” (4).

In his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, Foucault defines genealogy as an approach to discourses that “disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (Foucault, “Nietzsche” 139). In the same essay, Foucault defines ‘emergence’ as the entry and eruption of certain forces from the wings to the centre stage, as something that results from substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals (“Nietzsche” 147). The emergence of trans politics thus substituted subjugated knowledge with desubjugated awareness, displaced and replaced gender and biological essentialism with fluidity and reversed the dominant discourses of gender dichotomy and heterosexuality. It is not a search for the origins but rather a problematization of the present by revealing the power relations, omissions, and discontinuities in the past.

The emergence of transgender politics strove to write a critical history of the discourses on gender, which in the past, objectified and erased certain lives into the realms of psychiatry and madness. Susan Stryker, while trying to trace the course of development of transgender studies as a distinct and unique scholarship, defines it as the academic field that

focuses on transsexuality and cross-dressing, some aspects of intersexuality and homosexuality, cross-cultural and historical investigations of human gender diversity, myriad specific sub-cultural expressions of ‘gender atypicality’, theories of sexed embodiment and subjective gender identity development, law and public policy related to the regulation of gender expression and many other similar issues. (“(De)Subjugated” 3)

She calls it an interdisciplinary field of enquiry connected to anthropology,

psychiatry, medicine, sociology, life science, arts, and humanities. It discusses how embodied differences lead to social hierarchies of power which “operate on actual bodies...producing pain and pleasure, health and sickness, punishment and reward, life and death” (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated” 3).

The specific cultural context of trans emergence as a major theoretical space of debate on gender identity encompasses the problematic portrayals of trans identities in popular culture. It can be seen that the two, trans emergence in popular culture and trans theorization, occurred side by side at times complementing and mostly contradicting the identity politics put forward by the transgender movement. There were three major modes of cultural production related to trans emergence. The first mode of knowledge produced about transgender people belongs to the realm of academic scholarship. The evolution of transgender studies as a distinct scholarship and inquiry paved the way for newer insights into trans experience. This largely concentrated on the questions of an anthropological inquiry into the origin of transgender identity, the gender/sex debate, or medical-psychological probes into the causes of trans existence. According to Vivian K. Namaste, all such academic discourses ignored the everyday reality of trans lives. She demands that it is high time transgender scholarship understands that “our lives and our bodies are made up of more than gender and identity, more than a theory that justifies our very existence, more than mere performance, more than the interesting remark that we expose how gender works” (Namaste 1). According to Namaste, the mundane and uneventful truth of the transgender experience is something always ignored by academic or clinical researchers trying to define and theorize trans (3-4).

The parallel attempts made in the field of queer studies to appropriate transgender as one of the many manifestations of queer subjectivity also

problematized the way in which transgender was understood in academic discourses. Queer studies, with its predominant anti-heteronormative approach, failed to comprehend the trans community and their needs. Transgender studies adopted an axis of difference about how bodies, gender identities, social roles, and desires are interconnected. As stated by Stryker,

Queer studies sometimes perpetuates what might be called “homonormativity,” that is, a privileging of homosexual ways of differing from heterosocial norms, and an antipathy (or at least an unthinking blindness) toward other modes of queer difference. Transgender studies is in many ways more attuned to questions of embodiment and identity than to those of desire and sexuality, and is akin to other efforts to insist upon the salience of cross-cutting issues such as race, class, age, disability, and nationality within identity-based movements and communities. (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledge” 7)

The other source of information was provided by various popular media platforms. The larger public was keener on reading and watching the sensational stories that the popular media brought to them on this emerging community of gender variance. There were thousands of pulp magazine and tabloid newspaper stories and visual media depictions of trans existence which synched perfectly with the notion of heteronormative society’s ingrained prejudices and taboos about gender-nonconforming people. Most of such depictions produced negative stereotypes and since there were no other forms of representations to offset those negative images, they became the norm regarding trans portrayals in popular media. Since the knowledge produced by transgender studies remained within the space of academia, such popular media accounts gained popularity as ‘true accounts’ among common

men.

The most important and popular genre of information on trans people was provided by gender non-conforming people themselves in the form of confessional life writings. Trans autobiographies were an attempt to document oral histories of trans identities circulated within the medico-juridical circles and to own the stories of their own lives. With the advent of transgender studies as a distinct mode of academic enquiry, such narratives were largely brought under academic scrutiny and critiqued for their gender essentialist perspectives. According to critics like Sandy Stone and Bernice Hausman, these narratives repeated the often misleading and objectifying approach of medical and psychiatric discourses towards trans experience. The advent of the 21st century witnessed a paradigm shift in favour of more authentic and revisionary life narratives on trans subjectivity which had far-reaching impacts on the way gender and gender-related identity politics took shape during the 21st century.

This thesis analyses the life narratives of the select 21st century American trans authors and examines how these writers used the form of life narratives as a means to resist and reverse the hegemonic heteronormative gender discourse. These writers defied the notions of transnormativity projected and popularized by their predecessors through the genre of life narratives. Unlike the early authors of trans life narratives, these writers subvert the culturally constructed norms of gender and sex through authentically documenting the development of their transness. The texts chosen for the present study are *Becoming a Visible Man* (2004) by Jamison Green, *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: A Memoir* (2012) by Kate Bornstein, *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (2014) by Janet Mock, *Sissy: A Coming of Gender Story* (2019) by Jacob Tobia, and *Fairest: A Memoir* (2020) by Meredith Talusan. Unlike the writers of the 1900s' who presented themselves as

victims of gender-sex incongruity with no agency and ultimately saved and restored to the normalcy of gender binary by medical science, these writers seek to secure their agency in defining their identity. They promote the notion of transgender capacity, “the ability or the potential for making visible, bringing into experience, or knowing genders as mutable, successive, and multiple. The trait of those many things that support or demand accounts of gender’s dynamism, plurality, and expansiveness” (Getsy 47).

The problematization of transgender identity is a contribution of the medical discourses produced during the 18th and 19th centuries. Sexology, the scientific study of human sexuality, gained prominence during the time of the European Enlightenment. Professor Stephen Whittle in his article “A Brief History of Transgender Issues” states that the reason for such an increased interest in human sexology was the introduction of laws like the Criminal Law Act of 1885 passed in the UK and throughout Europe, which made all homosexual acts illegal which could lead to imprisonment of up to two years. Starting in the 1850s, several U.S. cities began passing municipal ordinances that made it illegal for a man or woman to appear in public “in a dress not belonging to his or her sex” (Stryker, *Transgender History* 38).

Though the historical reasons for such strict regulations are not known, Susan Stryker comments that the emergence of industrial urban living spaces, the advent of first-wave feminism and the migration of people belonging to different ethnicities to the West could be some probable reasons. 19th century with its modern industrial cities and working-class population provided people with an opportunity to live anonymously and engage in relationships outside heteronormativity, away from the hindrances of familial and religious surveillance. It led to the emergence of gay

communities. Women, on the other hand, were not able to do this due to domestic constraints. Hence lesbian subculture became prominent only during the 20th century. But the 1920s made a major shift when women became politically equipped with the newly granted voting rights. This homosexual subculture helped people with different and more liberated ways to express their gender identity. The anonymity of urban life enabled women to pass as men and men to pass as women. This was a threat to the established social structure (Stryker, *Transgender History* 40).

Stryker also opines that first-wave feminism with its insistence on dress reform to free women from the bondage of “long skirts and cumbersome undergarments” (Qtd. in Stryker, *Transgender History* 41) also challenged the distinction between men and women. Added to all this, there was a rush of trans-Pacific ethnic communities migrating from Asia to America. The clothing style of many such communities like that of the Chinese had no visible demarcation between that of the male and the female. It caused confusion among the white Europeans. Hence, race, class, culture, sexuality, and sexism worked together to make cross-dressing a social evil to be contained and regulated. It was needed to differentiate the white, male, heterosexual and middle-class European from the rest of the humanity.

These laws forced people who were trans to seek doctors who could cure them. This increased demand for a medical cure resulted in the birth of a whole new field of medicine called sexology. Increased interest in sexology led to the pathologization of many conditions and behaviours that were not in line with the accepted norms of sexuality and gender identity. During the 19th century, the publication of texts like *Psychopathia Sexualis* by Richard Von Kraft Ebing in 1877 brought sexuality under strict surveillance. Foucault in his *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, traces how the dimorphic nature of sex, treated as natural and invariable,

led to the emergence of gender dichotomy since gender was conventionally understood as an externalisation of one's sexual identity (104-105). Thus, the whole medical discourse on gender and sex was based on the logic that since there are only two sexes, gender is also dichotomous, either feminine or masculine. Any variation from this dimorphic development of sex or gender was considered a deviation or abnormality. Thus, as stated by Genny Beemyn in "A Presence in the Past: A Transgender Historiography", in terms of this newly emergent sexology, the degree to which gender nonconforming individuals identified as a gender different from their assigned gender "corresponded to the extent to which they were mentally disturbed" (4). Though all these medical narratives' stated intention was to bring in a social reform in favour of gender variant people by proving that their gender expression and sexual orientation was a medical condition and hence should be treated with scientific rationalism, the intention did not materialize properly.

Even before this, following European colonialism, Christianity with its rigid norms on sexuality tried to suppress the free expression of one's sexual and gender preferences in the name of sin and hellfire. After the emergence of scientific temperament post-reformation, the place of religion was taken by science and it threatened people and controlled their sexuality in the name of diseases. Science became the highest social authority. Medical science especially started playing a decisive role in defining everyday life. As stated by Susan Stryker, it was used to create exclusionary social categories like black people as inferior to the white, women as secondary to men and homosexuals and gender variant people as deviant and abnormal against heterosexual people (*Transgender History* 41). Thus, the medical discourses on gender variance "transform[ed] potentially neutral forms of human difference into unjust and oppressive social hierarchies" (Stryker, *Transgender*

History 41-42). This power of medical discourse to regulate societal norms has been particularly important in transgender history.

Before the advent of the scientific spirit of the 19th century, gender identity and sexuality were not taboo subjects. Individuals were allowed agency to explore and experiment with their gender identities and sexual preferences. Many ancient cultures and civilizations had gender identities outside the man-woman binary and they were respected and given their due space in society (Thomas 60). Leslie Feinberg in his essay “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come” says,

Transgender is a very ancient form of human expression that pre-dates oppression. It was once regarded with honour. A glance at human history proves that when societies were not ruled by exploiting classes that rely on divide-and-conquer tactics, ‘cross-gendered’ youths, women and men on all continents were respected members of their communities. (207)

A study of ancient civilizations and cultures will prove that this insistence on the sex-gender binary is rather the product of modern-day social structure. Leslie Feinberg states that the oppression of women leading to the oppression of all sexual minorities was the immediate result of the shift from communal, matrilineal societies to the patriarchal, nuclear family structure of the colonial era which survived on the concept of private ownership of property. Monogamy was supported to ensure the inheritance of property within the family and heterosexuality and the two-gender system became the norm. She quotes the studies conducted by the ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan to prove that the patriarchal form of the family was not the oldest form of human society. Feinberg says “to ‘justify’ the new economic system and to break the spirit of people who had lived and worked communally, a systematic downgrading of the status of women and an assault on the transgender population began”

(“Transgender Liberation” 209).

Thus, by the 11th century, the rise of private property, patriarchal family structure and social class division, together with the privileged ruling class and Christianity began the process of repression of all modes of self-expression that were outside the heterosexual norm. But, despite all such efforts, transgender was not eradicated. They were still seen in many cultures even amongst the ruling class. Leslie Feinberg’s essay “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come” provides a historical perspective in this regard. Transgender people were an integral part of the religious rites and rituals of many indigenous cultures. Feinberg cites the predominant role played by male transvestite shamans in the religious practices of communities like that of Araucanians of Chile and Argentina, the Guajira community of Venezuela and Colombia, the Tebuelche of Argentina, and Pardhis of India, West Africa and many other parts of the world (Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation” 215).

The pursuit of knowledge, especially the knowledge regarding human sexuality, during the 19th century, changed the whole perspective regarding sexuality. Instead of prohibition or regulation practiced during the previous centuries, the 19th century insisted on the repression of the so called ‘deviant sexualities.’ This was a major mode of power using which the ruling class and the medical field exercised their control over the masses. Anything outside heterosexuality had no right to exist. As stated by Foucault repression was different from prohibition as it “operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know” (*Sexuality* 4).

This repressive discourse on sexuality, which had its beginning in the 17th century, when capitalism was also becoming the order of the day, became the

dominant discourse of the bourgeois social structure. All sorts of transgressions were either silenced, or if possible, taken to places designated for such transgressions. Such people were either treated as patients with mental illness and confined inside mental asylums or limited to brothels (Foucault, *Sexuality* 4). This, in fact, was the early beginning of the social injustice and decentering of gender nonconforming people. Based on their gender expression and sexual orientation, some were recognized as legal and viable human beings, while some others as less human. Thus, human sexuality became a site of regular contention and debate with heterosexual hegemony playing the decisive role in matters of sexuality and gender politics. According to Judith Butler, “If the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that ‘undo’ the person by conferring recognition, or ‘undo’ the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced” (*Undoing Gender* 2). Foucault referred to this as biopower, the two major forms of which were the discipline of the human body and the regulation of population (Foucault, *Sexuality* 139).

Human body and human sexuality thus became a major preoccupation in the modern world because it dealt with these two forms of biopower. In this dominant discourse of heteronormative sexuality, “sex not only functions as a norm but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls” (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 12). All such regulatory practices in the name of heteronormativity during the 18th and 19th centuries thus created a section of people who found it difficult to belong to the privileged space of gender binary. They were denied recognition as equal ‘normal’ human beings. According to Chris Weedon “Non-recognition and non-identification

leaves the individual in an abject state of non-subjectivity and lack of agency. At best the individual concerned must fall back on subject positions other than the ones to which s/he is denied access” (*Identity and Culture* 7).

However, the discourses on sexuality that came into being during the early 19th century did not differentiate between sexual orientation and gender identity. The whole debate centred around the abnormality of homosexuality against the heterosexual norm. All those who crossed, transgressed, or deviated were universally identified as homosexuals. It failed to differentiate between homosexuals, cross-dressers, and transgender people. Any attempt to trace the history of transgender people is thus a complicated one. Genny Beemyn in their article “A Presence in the Past: A Transgender Historiography” states that,

Given the rich histories of individuals who perceived themselves and were perceived by their societies as gender nonconforming, it would be inappropriate to limit “transgender history” to people who lived at a time and place when the concept of “transgender” was available and used by them.

(“Presence in the Past” 113)

Though medical professionals had begun to recognize and analyze gender non-conforming people as early as the mid to late 19th century, they were not defined in terms of their gender identity till the early 20th century. Susan Stryker in her book *Transgender History* states that,

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, homosexual desire and gender variance were often closely associated; one common way of thinking about homosexuality back then was as gender “inversion,” in which a man who was attracted to men was thought to be acting like a woman, and a woman who desired women was considered

to be acting like a man. (41)

According to Haeefele Thomas, Kraft Ebing classified a trans identity “as the absolute worst and most degenerate form of homosexuality” (99). “He considered those who felt they were the “opposite” sex and had been assigned the wrong sex at birth to be suffering from a form of psychosis” (Beemyn, “Presence in the Past” 114). The notion of identity is always relational in the sense it relies on similarities and differences in defining subjectivities. The dominant discourse on sexuality during the 19th century was not familiar with the concept of gender identity or gender expression. For them everything different from heteronormativity was homosexuality. The identity categories, as discussed by the medical practitioners of the time, were exclusionary in nature as they failed to comprehend and represent the distinction between gender identity and sexual orientation. Most of such medical narratives were written by non-transgender people till the 1940s and treated gender non-conformity as pathology. This further problematized the debates related to sexual politics. This situation necessitated the need for a counter cultural discourse that would state what actually the transgender identity was.

Just as homosexuals came up with their own discourse during the 19th century, transgender identities also started to speak for themselves. The late 19th and early 20th centuries were fertile grounds for ever-increasing theories and terminology related to transgender identity. Stryker traces the gradual shift from misappropriating trans as homosexuals to the emergence of transgender identity as follows,

One early psychiatrist, Albert Moll, wrote about *conträre Geschlechtsempfindung* (contrary sexual feeling) in 1891; another, Max Marcuse, described it as *Geschlechtsumwandlungstreib* (drive for sex transformation) in 1913. That same year, British psychologist Havelock Ellis

coined “Sexo-Aesthetic Inversion” (wanting to look like the other sex) and later, in 1928, “Eonism,” which referred to the Chevalier D’eon, a member of the court of Louis XVI who, at various stages of life, lived alternately as a man and as a woman. (*Transgender History* 44)

The publication of *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress* in 1910 by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a German Jewish sexologist and a “pivotal figure in the political history of sexuality and gender” (Stryker, *Transgender History* 44) was a milestone in the emergence of this reverse identity politics concerning transgender people. He coined the term ‘transvestite’ to differentiate between homosexuals and men who dressed and acted like women because they felt like women, individuals who were overcome with a “feeling of peace, security and exaltation, happiness and well-being...when in the clothing of the other sex” (Hirschfeld 125). For the first time in the history of the studies on gender, transgender people were understood as different from homosexuals. Though Hirschfeld could not establish that sexual orientation and gender identity are two different notions, he laid the foundations for further research in that direction. Contrary to the popular notion of gender non-conforming people as homosexuals, Hirschfeld said that they could be of any sexual orientation like homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual or asexual. His Institute for Sexual Research established in 1919 was the first clinic of its kind.

The most important contribution made by Hirschfeld is his theorization of sexual intermediaries. His studies popularized “the idea that, every human being represented a unique combination of sex characteristics, secondary sex-linked traits, erotic preferences, psychological inclinations, and culturally acquired habits and practices” (Stryker, *Transgender History* 45). He had appealed before the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the first organization to devote itself to social reform on

behalf of sexual minorities in favour of sexual intermediaries. He also made contributions in this field as the editor of the first scientific journal on “sexual variants,” *The Yearbook for Sexual Intermediaries*, published between 1899 and 1923, and was a founding member of Sigmund Freud’s Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1908. In 1928, he became the founding president of the World League for Sexual Reform advocating on behalf of transgender people. His institute functioned as the focal point of the international community of transgendered people and modern progressive medical experts who prepared the ground for the post World War II transgender movement. Eugen Steinach, the Austrian endocrinologist, who first understood the effects of sex hormones, and Harry Benjamin, the German-born doctor who became the leading medical authority on transsexuality in the 1950s, were his colleagues.

Thus, the beginning of the 20th century marked a major shift in its approach towards sexual minorities and gender non-confirming people by allowing them some kind of agency in describing their experience. But this was not encouraged by the state apparatus. When Hitler rose to power in Germany in 1930, Hirschfeld’s institute was burned down along with his books. But his theories predate the current concepts regarding sexual orientation and gender fluidity. Through the works of Hirschfeld, transsexuality became a recognised phenomenon, different from homosexuality, available for academic inquiry. At Hirschfeld's clinic, the initial attempts at sex change operations were performed by Dr. Felix Abraham, “a mastectomy on a trans man in 1926, a penectomy on his domestic servant Dora in 1930, and a vaginoplasty on Lili Elbe, a Danish painter, in 1931” (Whittle, “A Brief History”).

As opined by Foucault, the strict regulations imposed on discourses on sexuality have only resulted in a veritable discursive explosion around and apropos of

sex (*Sexuality* 17). This seems to be true with regard to transgender discourses. The publication of *Transvestites* was followed by another ground-breaking publication, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* by Dr. Harry Benjamin in 1966. Even before 1950s' there were a few publications that spoke of transgender existence. *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology* published in 1946 by Michael Dillon, a British physician is one such text. Dillon was the first recorded female-assigned, non-intersexed individual to have taken testosterone for transforming his body and to have undergone female-to-male genital surgeries as early as 1940. Dillon's arguments in the book later became one of the basic tenets of transgender politics. He said that "where the mind cannot be made to fit the body, the body should be made to fit, approximately, at any rate to the mind, despite the prejudices of those who have not suffered these things" (Dillon, 53).

Thus, transsexual identity in its crude form had already emerged in the U.S. as well as in various parts of Europe even before the sexological category of medically assisted transsexual came into being. Genny Beemyn and Joanne Meyerowitz in their articles "Transgender History in the United States" and "Sex Change and Popular Press: Historical Notes on Transsexuality in the United States, 1930–1955" (1998) respectively provide a comprehensive picture of the evolution of this transsexual identity. The media sensationalization of sex change as early as the 1930s gave gender-nonconforming people hopes regarding a promised world. As stated by Meyerowitz, "Although the stories in the American press conflated a European version of sex change surgery for "transvestites" with the more widely known surgeries for non-intersexed conditions, they allowed some non-intersexed readers to envision sex change as a real possibility for themselves" (Meyerowitz, "Sex Change and the Popular Press" 160).

Beginning from the year 1910, when Eugen Steinach, a physiologist in Vienna, gained popular media attention for his transplantation experiments on rats and guinea pigs, the possibility of surgical transformation of the human body was explored by medical practitioners and laymen around the world. His research furnished evidence regarding what hormones can do in deciding the sexual attributes of living beings. Thus, testosterone and oestrogen became the magical remedies for those who aspired body transformation. In the early 20th century, the surgical transformation of sex only meant the amputation of certain body parts. But still, it was practised in various parts of Europe (Meyerowitz, “Sex Change and the Popular Press” 163).

In 1949, Roberta Cowell, Britain’s first male-to-female trans woman underwent her unofficial orchidectomy (removal of the testicles) under the supervision of Dr. Michael Dillon. In 1931, Dorchen Richter, a male assigned German had a vagina constructed in the first documented sex transformation surgery held in Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sexual Science (Beemyn, *Transgender History* 10). Gradually transsexuality became an indispensable attribute of the discourse of human gender. Germany with Hirschfeld and his institute became the epicentre of sex transformation surgery. Hirschfeld’s most famous and one of his institute’s last patients was the Dutch painter Einar Wegener, who identified and presented herself as a woman and called herself Lili Elbe. She underwent transformation surgeries to castrate her penis, construct vagina and insert ovaries in the 1920s. She died following the complications caused by the surgery to implant the uterus, the ultimate step toward being a ‘complete woman.’ Her story came to the limelight when her friend Ernst Ludwig Hathorn Jacobson published a fictionalised biography of her, based on her diary entries and letters titled *A Man Changes His Sex*, in Dutch and German in

1932 under the pseudonym Niels Hoyer. It was translated into English a year later as *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex*. It is the first known book-length account of a gender transition (Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* 2002). The very next year Hirschfeld's institute was burned down with his books by the Nazis as he, according to Hitler, was the "the most dangerous Jew in Germany" (Stryker, *Transgender History* 40).

Similar narratives on the possibility of a physical transition started gaining popularity in America during the 1930s'. Most of such narratives were gender essentialist in nature. These accounts, as stated by Meyerowitz, "downplayed Elbe's transvestism and emphasized her alleged (and extremely unlikely) hermaphroditism" (*How Sex Changed* 164). All transition stories, which appeared in sensational magazines or tabloid newspapers projected these surgeries as attempts made by the medical fields to cure abnormalities like intersexuality, homosexuality, or transvestism. All such narratives rearticulated the theory of biological determinism. It re-established the body as the source of gender expression and sexual orientation. "In this binarist vision of sex, science could and should correct nature's tragic 'rare blunders', creating an unambiguous male or female sex from a condition of ambiguity" (Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* 163-164).

Though Hirschfeld tried to differentiate transvestites from intersex or homosexuals, it continued to be treated as similar till the 1950s' until Dr. Harry Benjamin popularised the new terminology 'Transsexuals'. According to Benjamin, Transsexualism is a different problem and a much greater one. It indicates more than just playing a role. It denotes the intense and often obsessive desire to change the entire sexual status including the anatomical structure. "While the male transvestite, *enacts* the role of a woman, the transsexualist wants to *be* one and *function* as one,

wishing to assume as many of her characteristics as possible, physical, mental and sexual” (Benjamin, “Transsexualism and Transvestism” 46).

Though the word “transsexual” became popular with Benjamin’s book, prior to Benjamin, the word ‘Transexual’ (with one ‘s’ in spelling) was used in 1949 by David Cauldwell in his article “Psychopathia Transexualis” published in *Sexology*, vol. 16. But the credit for coining the term ‘transsexual’ goes to Hirschfeld who used the expression “*seelischer Transsexualismus*”, or “psychic transsexualism” (Cauldwell 40). The article aimed at an excessive pathologization of gender variant people who, according to Cauldwell, were genetically degenerate. For him, “When an individual fails to mature according to his (or her) proper biological and sexological status, such an individual is psychologically (mentally) deficient. Such an individual is what may be called a *psychopathic transexual* That which pertains to the psychopathic transexual may be called *psychopathia transexualis*” (Cauldwell 40-41).

During the same period, popular media reports on the transformation of many known identities like the twenty-three-year-old Belgian cycling champion Elvira de Bruyne, British shot-put and javelin champion Mary Edith Louise Weston, Czechoslovakian runner Zdenka Koubkova, Barbara Richards, who had petitioned the Superior Court of California to change her name from Edward and assume the legal status of woman and others started appearing. It encouraged those who found possibilities in it for themselves. But at the same time, doctors and psychiatrists were growing hostile towards enquiries from gender non-conforming people for sex transformations. For most of them, it was something to be done on intersex people. Most of these stories narrated instances of male-to-female transitions and the growing hostility of the privileged class against this exposed the polemics of patriarchal

supremacy.

Parallel to such developments taking place in the field of sexology, attempts were also made in the direction of theorizing concepts like gender and gender identity which influenced Dr. Harry Benjamin and his conclusions. The word ‘gender’, ‘gender role’, and ‘sexual orientation’ were used in the modern sense of the word for the first time by sexologist John William Money in 1955. Until then sex and gender were used interchangeably. Though many of Money’s experiments, like his involuntary sex reassignment of David Reimer, were questioned and challenged by future experts, his arguments helped replace the prominent view of gender essentialism, gender as biological and inherent. In “Hermaphroditism, Gender, and Precocity in Hyperadrenocorticism: Psychologic Findings”, Money defined gender role as “all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl, or woman, respectively. It includes, but is not restricted to, sexuality in the sense of eroticism” (Money 259). Later in 1964, psychoanalyst Robert Stoller commented that sex is biological and gender is social. The postulates put forward by Stoller helped distinguish between biological sex, social gender role, and subjective or “psychological” gender identity. He published his research findings in a series of influential books, including *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (1968), *Perversion: The Erotic Form of Hatred* (1975), *Sexual Excitement: Dynamics of Erotic Life* (1979), *Presentations of Gender* (1985). His book *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (1968) is considered instrumental in popularising the idea of gender identity.

Robert Stoller in *Sex and Gender: The Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (1968) wrote that “those aspects of sexuality that are called gender are

primarily culturally determined” (xiii) and that “gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations” (9). Robert Stoller and Ralph Greenson together introduced the term ‘gender identity’ at the 23rd International Psycho-Analytical Congress in Stockholm (July–August 1963). According to Ralph Greenson, gender identity is “one’s sense of being a member of a particular sex; it is expressed clinically in the awareness of being a man or male in distinction to being a woman or female” (217). The argument put forward by Money and Stoller helped gender non-conforming people to defend biological essentialism that defined gender discourse though it did not provide an answer for trans issue.

The medical discourses of early 19th century, though misleading and largely essentialist, saved gender variant people from being labelled as criminals. Instead, they got pathologized for their mode of gender expression. Likewise, the academic discourses that developed on the concept of gender provided the trans community with an opportunity to challenge biological determinism and proclaim that biology is not destiny. Rejecting the idea of the biological foundation of gender development, Stoller said that gender identity is defined not just by the biological and hormonal makeup, but also by cultural, environmental, and psychological factors. Psychology rejected biology as the sole source of gender identity and made it highly subjective by claiming that gender identity is the way one feels his or her ‘innate self’, the felt sense of one’s subjectivity. Around the same time, in 1967, Harold Garfinkel, social interaction theorist, published his research findings in his book *Studies in Ethnomethodology*.

Ethnomethodology is a phenomenological approach used to analyse and comprehend the means by which people construct a sense of reality through their day-to-day interactions with the external world. For Garfinkel, gender was, “a managed

achievement” and therefore “real” —as real as any other aspect of our collectively produced and collectively sustained sense of reality. For him, the construction of gender involves an interpretation or “reading of the body for social cues, but it is not a material property of the body itself” (Stryker and Whittle, *Transgender Studies* 58). He defined ‘passing’ as “The work of achieving and making secure their rights to live in the elected sex status while providing for the possibility of detection and ruin carried out within the socially structured conditions in which this work occurred” (Garfinkel 118). The notion of ‘passing’ later became the focal point of transgender discourse. A psychoanalytic explanation for cross gender identification was later provided by Charles Shepherdson which shifted the focus from both biological essentialism and social constructionism (Stryker and Whittle, *Transgender Studies* 94). Psychoanalysis held the theory that the issue of transsexualism is a critical third question regarding “how the embodied human subject acquires a body image and then situates that imaginary body in the symbolic realm of language and culture” (Stryker and Whittle, *Transgender Studies* 94). This process of acquiring sexual differentiation has nothing to do with sex or gender. Transgender people rejected this perspective because they felt that instead of trying to change the self in accordance with the body, it is always better and easy to resort to medical science which will realign the body in accordance with the self.

Though there were attempts to destabilize the binary of gendered embodiments through medically aided body mutations, none of such stories was endorsed as true by the mainstream media until 1 December 1952 when the *New York Daily* greeted its readers with the headline on the first page “EX-GI BECOMES BLONDE BEAUTY: OPERATIONS TRANSFORM BRONX YOUTH” (Jorgensen V). Jorgensen’s transformation and the media attention it got introduced and

popularised the word 'transsexual' into the American everyday vocabulary. She had her surgery in Copenhagen since such surgeries were illegal in America then. "Her 'sex change' was viewed by many as a miracle of God in which not Christ, but Christine- Man reborn as Woman- heralded a new dispensation of human history" (Jorgensen VI). Jorgensen's change was also viewed as an instance of challenge that the American masculinity was facing after World War II.

The increased population mobilization for the Second World War compelled the women folk of the family to step out of the domestic sphere and enter the workplace thus resulting in a role reversal. The men on the other hand started to engage themselves increasingly in homosexual alliances, especially within the "sex-segregated military settings" (Jorgensen VII). Being a homosexual then was being less masculine. In such a cultural context a former soldier altering his body to become a woman undoubtedly intensified the anxieties that were already there regarding gender and sexuality. It also provided gender-variant people with a concrete instance to believe in the power of science to change one's destiny and they engaged themselves more vigorously in their search for such facilities. Thus, the birth of Christine Jorgensen from George Jorgensen and her journey from being labelled as a hermaphrodite, then as a transvestite and finally as a transsexual becomes the decisive moment in the history of American transgender identity politics.

Meanwhile, the early 20th century also saw attempts made by many gender variant people to legitimize their existence through forming alliances among similar people and also through writing. Though rudimentary, such discourses made their permanent imprints in the history of transgender discourse. Attempts to establish social network groups of gender variant people like The Cercle Hermaphroditos had begun as early as 1895. The declared aim was to safeguard gender-variant people

against social persecution and marginalization. Such attempts started gaining popular attention only during the 1950s. Dr. Karl Bowman and his research related to the cause and cure for homosexuality deserve a mention in this regard. His research brought him closer to many transsexual persons living in San Francisco. One such acquaintance, Louis Lawrence, had a wide interaction network with the transsexual community. This brought together the world of gender-variant people and the medical field, an alliance that later proved to be the greatest threat to the gender binary in America. This alliance widened its scope when Dr. Harry Benjamin joined the group.

The publication of *Transsexual Phenomenon* by Harry Benjamin in 1966 was instrumental in bringing new awareness about transgender people. It helped differentiate between transvestite, who cross-dressed but never wanted to change sex and transsexuals who desperately wanted to reshape their bodies to match their gender identity. In the introductory passage to the text, Benjamin mentioned the “unsought publicity” of Jorgensen’s transition which made the text as well as a discussion of transsexualism possible. He says, “The case of Christine Jorgensen focused attention on the problem as never before. Without her courage and determination, undoubtedly springing from a force deep inside her, transsexualism might be still unknown” (Benjamin 4).

Benjamin’s discourse on gender variant people is seminal since it helped transsexual people to declare to the world that they should not be grouped among cross-dressers or intersexed people. For Benjamin, “The transvestite has a social problem. The transsexual has a gender problem. The homosexual has a sex problem” (Benjamin 17). Benjamin first used the word “transsexual” in 1953 in his article “Transvestism and Transsexualism” which he wrote for *The International Journal of Sexology*, immediately after the Jorgensen incident. *The Transsexual Phenomenon*

gradually became a guidebook of sex transition. There is a fundamental difference in the way in which Cauldwell and Benjamin approached Transsexuals. For Cauldwell, transsexualism was a mental illness; hence, he denied sex reassignment surgery (SRS) for people with gender variance. According to Cauldwell, SRS should be performed only on intersex people. Benjamin, on the other hand, argued that since psychotherapy failed to offer a solution for transsexuality, it should be treated as psychopathology and should be treated through SRS as the only way to help people. He also developed Standards of Care (SoC) with regard to hormonal and SRS treatment for transsexual people. His attempts also forced the American Psychological Association to recognize transsexualism as a psychiatric problem under the heading Gender Identity Disorder in the third edition of *Diseases and Statistical Manual* published in 1980, thus medically legitimizing transsexualism and its treatment.

In the 1960s America witnessed a gender revolution. The rigid biologism gradually gave way to more liberal views on gender identity as a construct of an individual psyche. The discourses on sex and gender identity expanded its horizon into the world of academia when doctors began organizing conferences to promote the study of and treatment for transsexuals. In 1966, with financial aid from Reed Erickson's 'Erickson Educational Foundation', Johns Hopkins University Hospital opened its Gender Identity Clinic to offer gender reassignment surgery. In 1979, The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, an organization functioning towards the well-being of transsexuals was founded. Benjamin's text *The Transsexual Phenomenon* was used as a guidebook by those who wanted to change their sex so that they can give the desired behaviour which will qualify them for SRS. Transsexuality transformed from being a concept to a medically proven embodied identity. A new minority of self-identified transsexuals emerged in America and by

the end of the 20th century their demand for legal and social rights culminated in loud social movements (Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* 8).

While Benjamin's theories proved beneficial to individuals seeking to redefine their gender identity through sex reassignment, it was highly exclusionary in nature with regard to hundreds and thousands of those who did not identify themselves as either cisgender or as transvestites or transsexuals. Gender identity clinics had an institutionalized model for a true transsexual based on Benjamin's classifications. Only those who claimed to fit into this model, only those who could prove through their life and behavioural patterns that they felt 'trapped in the wrong body' from the very beginning of their consciousness were granted surgical assistance. According to Dallas Denny, the gender identity clinics adopted this presumption of heterosexuality and a binary understanding of gender that expected transsexual people to conform to stereotypical gender norms (Qtd. in Beemyn, *Transgender History* 17). Such people were addressed by a specific nomenclature 'transgenderism' for the first time in the 1965 edition of *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology* by Psychiatrist John F. Oliven (but the 1955 first edition of the book used the word transsexual). According to him the use of the term transsexualism to refer to "primary transvestites" (those who cross-dress without changing physical sex) is wrong since it has no relation to sex. For him, transgenderism is an in-between phase with transvestism and transsexualism on each end. He says, "Where the compulsive urge reaches beyond female vestments and becomes an urge for gender ("sex") change, transvestism becomes "transsexualism" (Oliven 54). The term in its variant forms like "transgenderal" and "transgenderist" was later popularised by Virginia Prince in her articles. David Valentine states that "As early as the December 1969 issue of *Transvestia* (#60), Prince created a category 'transgenderal' for transvestites who lived full time as women but who did not intend

to have SRS” (Valentine 261). Valentine quotes Robert Hill’s dissertation thesis to state that another pioneer to use the related term ‘transgenderist’ for the first time in print was Ariadne Kane in 1976 in *Hose and Heels Magazine* (261).

Virginia Prince born in Los Angeles in 1912 was assigned male at birth. But gradually she started cross-dressing as a female and in 1968 decided to present herself as a woman and accepted the name, Virginia Prince. She was different from transvestites who cross-dressed occasionally, and a transsexual who changed sex. Prince used the term ‘Transgenderal’ to address people like her, who “permanently changed social gender through the public presentation of self, without recourse to genital transformation” (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated” 4). In 1952 she founded *Transvestia: The Journal of the American Society for Equality in Dress*, the first-ever political publication related to the transgender community in America. But Prince’s use of the term ‘transgenderal’ invited a lot of criticism from the transsexual community who considered it exclusionary. Prince thought that sex is immutable, what you change is your gender. She considered herself a male heterosexual cross-dresser and insisted on heterosexuality as a norm even in the case of transvestites. She also founded The Hose and Heels Club, the first-ever social organization for transgender people, which later became Foundation for Personality Expression (FPE) or Tri-Ess. As stated by Susan Stryker,

In spite of her open disdain for homosexuals, her frequently expressed negative opinion of transsexual surgeries and her conservative stereotypes regarding masculinity and femininity, Prince (who began living full-time as a woman in 1968) has to be considered a central figure in the early history of the contemporary transgender political movement. (*Transgender History* 52)

Prince’s ideas on gender variance could never pioneer an inclusive political

movement of transgender, transsexual, and homosexual minorities since she considered anything outside her exclusionary definition of 'transgenderal' with detest. But her activities became the trailblazer of such a movement in America.

Though tracing the evolution of transgender etymology seems linear and easy, many critics have questioned the authority and politics of the construction of such a history. Most of the historians like Susan Stryker, Genny Beemyn, Joanne Meyerowitz, Richard Ekins and Dave King attributed the coinage of the term 'transgender' to Oliven and/or Prince and that of 'transsexual' to Benjamin and/or Cauldwell. But there are parallel counter-history narratives that question the simplification of the process of trans emergence through this history. For instance, Dr. K J Rawson, the Director of the Digital Transgender Archive and Cristine Williams, a Historian, challenge this linear narrative in their article "Transgender*: The Rhetorical Landscape of a Term" published in the journal *Present Tense* in 2014. They say that the available historical account regarding the emergence of the term 'transgender' is not just historically inaccurate "but it also represents divergent ways of understanding how subcultural terminology is invented and circulated" (2).

The constructed context of the origin of the term 'transgender' became the reason for the contentious reception it received from the community. It was rejected by transsexuals by calling it exclusionary and for many others, it was predominantly a white American terminology which does not represent many divergent groups like the black or Asian transgender people. Cristine Williams in her blog post, "Critiquing Academic "Coinage" Myths: The Virginia Prince Fountainhead Myth" published in 2012 says that this linear history ignored the community process involved in forming a lexicon for self-identity. Instead, it looks like Prince, from the top, invented a group, coined a word to refer to them and then passed it on to the lower, grassroots members

of the group. She cites historical shreds of evidence for the use of the word ‘transex’ as early as 1857 and the use of ‘transgenderist’ in 1975.

Parallel to the formation of such counter critiques evolving against the established academic history of transgender emergence, mostly outside the space of academia, it can be also seen that the terms used to refer to gender variant people is always in flux, still changing, still evolving. From the point of transgender, it has further advanced to terms like gender fluid, gender queer, trans or trans* (pronounced "trans with an asterisk") which are less biased in comparison to their predecessors. It was Jack Halberstam who popularized the term “trans*” in his book *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* in 2018. Halberstam states that,

I have selected the term “trans*” for this book precisely to open the term up to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance. As we will see, the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be, and perhaps most importantly, it makes trans people the authors of their own categorizations. (4)

Some prefer ‘transgendering’ instead of the noun and adjective ‘transgender’ because of its focus not on *types* of people, but on behaviour and social process of moving across (transferring) from one pre-existing gender category to another (either temporarily or permanently); to the idea of living in between genders; and to the idea of living ‘beyond gender’ altogether. ‘Transgender’ or ‘trans’ has become the current terminology used to represent gender non-conforming people worldwide. But at the

same time, the term and the identity politics attached to the term still remain predominantly an Anglo-American one. A cross-cultural approach will expose the minute nuances of meanings and subjectivity attached to terms that are regionally used by cultures and ethnicities elsewhere to refer to people who transgress the norms of the gender binary. However, transgender/trans acts as a unifying force striving towards the construction of a political alliance of gender non-conforming people at the same time acknowledging the cultural and geographical variations and connotations this term may imply.

This study prefers to use the term 'trans' to refer to gender-variant people to evade the possibility of gender categorization. The authors chosen for the present study represent diverse forms of gender variance and hence using transgender or transsexual will cause misleading categorizations. Whenever the terms 'trans' or 'transgender' appear in this thesis, they should be understood in their broader sense, as terms designating gender identities beyond the cultural codes of binary. The current study also uses gender-neutral pronouns like 'hir'/'ze' or 'their' as per the stated preference and self-identification of the authors mentioned.

The maturing process of transgender discourse in America was one of rejections and renewals through a series of politically loaded protest movements. The three decades between 1960 and 1990 can well be regarded as the transitional phase in the evolution of transgender scholarship from the study of transgender phenomena to transgender studies. According to Susan Stryker, the study of transgender phenomena is "a long-standing, ongoing project in cultures of European origin" (Stryker, "(De)Subjugated" 12) which was one of trans objectification largely undertaken by medical or legal agencies. It largely aimed at the erasure or delegitimization of trans subjectivity. But from the 1960s onwards a new critical practice emerged as part of

the postmodern conditions of knowledge production. The emergent field of transgender studies, as against the study of transgender phenomena, gave prominence to the “embodied experience of the speaking subject...the subjective knowledge of being transgender” over the kind of objective knowledge produced by the exterior agencies (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated” 12). It was characterised by many social protest movements against the marginalization of minority gender and sexually oriented people. Though the trans community was also at the forefront of such social upheavals, it was largely labelled as gay and lesbian protest movement which led to the political organization of homosexual communities with trans people on the periphery. Susan Stryker in her *Transgender History* provides an account of the development of such protests in America. Her historicist reading reveals how this emergence was intricately linked to the major historical and political changes that took place in America during the second half of the 20th century. In her opinion, transgender politics was not just a gender identity politics, but it reflected the changing cultural and social structures of post-world War America. (Stryker, *Transgender History* 67).

The Stone Wall riot of 1969 is usually considered the trigger point of resistance movements offered by people who trespassed the boundaries of gender and sexuality norms. The police harassment of transgender and homosexual communities and the resulting Compton cafeteria riot of 1966 which took place in the Tenderloin region of San Francisco can be historically contextualised in the urban renewal and redevelopment and heightened police surveillance after the 1964-66 escalation of U.S. troops in Vietnam. Stryker thus attributes greater dimensions to the emergence of transgender studies in America. Most of the theorizations that emerged around trans politics in the US and UK follow a similar trait. From the early 1960s onwards the

notions regarding trans existence were undergoing drastic changes. Sex reassignment surgeries, which were exceedingly rare and illegal in America, became popular and many doctors like Dr. Harry Benjamin sympathetically addressed the need of trans people for surgeries. Many universities established gender research clinics like John Hopkins in 1966, the Gender Identity Research Clinic at UCLA in 1962, the Harry Benjamin Foundation in 1964 and the University of California in San Francisco in 1964. The Standards of Care (SoC) approved by Harry Benjamin and his associates in the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA) in 1979 helped establish a medically legitimate model of transsexuality. In 1980 transsexualism entered the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) as gender identity disorder which was renamed as gender dysphoria later in DSM5 in 2013 to avoid stigma while ensuring medical care to the trans community. Though it treated transsexualism as a mental disorder, this entry helped transsexual people seek better healthcare facilities. From the 1960s onward transsexual people started organizing themselves in search of civil and legal rights as well as for mutual support.

There were revolutionary decisions taken by law during this period like the one taken by Judge Francis N Pecora of New York in giving legal permission to change sex and name in legal documents after sex change surgery in 1968. Though this was not a popular decision, "The case set a precedent for transsexual civil rights" (Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* 208). Later in 1971, the *Mary Land Law Review* gave a new definition to legal sex that considered postoperative anatomy and gender identity as the deciding criteria. The founding of the Erickson Educational Foundation (EEF) in 1964 provided much-needed financial support for the trans organization and advocacy. EEF funded for medical research, and academic programmes as well as for

scholarly publication on trans identity and trans issues.

Gaining momentum from all such social and political movements, transgender studies made its presence in the academic space as an emerging field of cultural enquiry by 1990. Though the term 'transgender' was popularized early in the 1960s by Prince, it was not accepted as a self-identificatory label by all the gender minority people. The transsexual community especially had ideological differences in this respect since in Prince's usage it predominantly referred to the heterosexual male cross-dressers. A paradigm shift occurred when Leslie Feinberg published her highly political pamphlet "Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come" in 1992. In this, she used "transgender" as an umbrella term to include all gender non-conforming people like transsexuals, butch lesbians, cross-dressers, and others in her attempt to "trace the historic rise of an oppression that, as yet, has no commonly agreed names" (Feinberg, "Transgender Liberation" 205).

Trans theorizing, in the sense in which Feinberg used it, explicitly aimed at the delegitimization of the idea of fixity in gender. As stated by Chris Beasley in *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers* Transgender politics is closer to the "Queer stance [and] opposed to stable identity, promoting outlaw or ambiguous positioning, and set against transsexualism's commitment to finding identity" (153). The debate between transsexual and transgender politics was further continued by many critics and activists. When people like Margaret O'Hartigan, Jay Prosser, and Viviane Namaste supported the material reality of transsexual bodies, pioneers of transgender ideology like Sandy Stone, Leslie Feinberg, Kate Bornstein, and Bernice Hausman rejected the same and asked transsexual individuals to outgrow their trans body obsession. Margaret O'Hartigan for instance vigorously argued against the stance that sex change is gender change. She put forward the argument that her sex

change was not to achieve gender change, but to “maintain and enhance a gender continuity-her deeply felt sense of femininity” (qtd. in Beasley 52). In her 1993 article, “Changing Sex is not Changing Gender”, O’Hartigan states, “I changed my sex. Like the hijra of India and the gallae of Rome I took cold steel to myself and proved that anatomy is not destiny. . . . I am not transgender” (20).

Despite such contradictory ideological positions, transgender gradually emerged as a hybridised cultural construct capable of resisting and destabilizing the colonial discourses of gender identity and the field of transgender studies became the third space where the gender minority negotiated the forms of their uprising. ‘Hybridity’ and ‘Third Space’ are two concepts popularised by Homi K Bhaba with reference to post-colonial cultural articulation. In his seminal text, *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhaba says that the process of social articulation of difference from a minority perspective is the result of a “complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformations” (2). Such articulations will take one beyond the authenticated cultural tradition and “displace the binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed- Black/White, Self/Other” (Bhaba 3). The transgender, in this regard, becomes the minority articulation of difference that challenges the binary construction of gender identity.

Bhaba calls this a liminal space that prevents the imposition of fixed hierarchies. The present is marked by the redefinition of “homogenous national culture and consensual transmission of historical traditions” (Bhaba 5). What Bhaba said about post-colonial culture is very much applicable to the decolonization of an imposed gender binary. Transgender politics acts as a third space “which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meanings and symbols of

culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhaba 37). The third space approach towards transgender scholarship is a means to project the possibility of understanding gender identity as a new hybridized entity as opposed to the purity attributed to gender in the essentialist discourses. Positioning transgender discourse in the third space thus makes it a politically charged act of disrupting the hegemonic structures of identity discourse around sexual dimorphism and gender binary with a reverse gaze.

Transgender identity, in this third space, emerges as the “third gender category” (Sandoval 46-47). The use of ‘third gender’ to refer to gender non-conforming people has given rise to debates over its implied interpretations. The term ‘third gender’ was first introduced by M Kay Martin and Barbara Voorhies to account for the ethnographic details that some cultures had gender identities outside the two-gender frame ((Towle and Morgan 668). The term often attributed legitimacy to gender variation, especially in cultures other than the West. For the western readers ‘third gender’ became an expression of their interest in the exotic other with no relevance to their modern culture. According to Evan B. Towle and Lynn M. Morgan, many trans historians also committed the same mistakes while tracing the history of transgender people. Susan Stryker and Leslie Feinberg refer to the Indian Hijra and Native American berdache as evidence of the existence of transgender practices in the past.

The use of ‘third gender’ was beneficial in many ways though it suffered from the flaws of “the primordial location, reductionism and exclusionism, and the west versus the rest debate” (Towle and Morgan 671-672). According to Marjorie Garber, “thirds are analytically useful because they upset the binary and encourage flexibility.... [It is] a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility”

(Towle and Morgan 671). It functioned as an apt rhetorical and analytical device to accommodate contradictions and thus stood for tolerance of cultural diversity and exposed the social agenda concerning sexuality, power, and gender. At the same time, as stated by Julia Serano, the process of third gendering should be approached with caution. Using the third gender as a general category to refer to all those who occupy a space outside the gender binary will be disrespectful to those trans people who identify themselves as man or woman. Hence, “the tendency to third-gender people seems to stem from both gender entitlement and oppositional sexism” (Serano 132). Third gender is a useful category only to the extent that it provides an inclusive space for gender variant people, not as a generic term to refer to all gender variant people whose relationship with and manifestations of gender varies largely from one another.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the major mode of discourse used by trans community to document their subjectivity from the beginning is life narratives. Autobiography as a genre of discourse thus plays a pivotal role in trans identity formation. Until the early 1900s’ transsexuals wrote about themselves through autobiographies. Europeans were the first ones to publish trans autobiographies. There were attempts to produce such narratives from the part of the transgender community even before they came to be known under the umbrella terminology of ‘transgender’. Jennie June (Ralph Werther/Earl Lind) of New York who aligned herself with female identity and believed herself to be an androgyne had published two autobiographies titled *Autobiography of an Androgyne* (1918) and *The Female Impersonators* (1922). She intended the first to be read by doctors and the second by the general public so that androgynism would be sufficiently understood. This was an attempt made towards using the narrative of one’s own life with the intention to legitimate what one was experiencing with regard to gender identity. Such attempts to gain agency as

speaking subjects had started even during the early 1900s'.

These discourses survived and gained circulation largely amongst the minority, who had similar gender identity confusions. But the efficacy of trans life writings, as the most authentic mode of knowledge production regarding how transgender people are located in the world, is a debatable proposition. The first known book-length account *Man into Woman: An Authentic Record of a Change of Sex* published in 1933 is the narrative of Lili Elbe, a male-born Danish painter who identified and lived as a woman in the 1920s. Other major trans life narratives published in Britain during the time were Robert Allen's *But for the Grace: The True Story of a Dual Existence*, and Roberta Cowell's *Roberta Cowell's Story by Herself* both published in 1954. Jan Morris' *Conundrum* published in 1974 was also instrumental in popularizing trans life narratives in Britain. In America, the genre of trans life writings started gaining popularity with the publication of Christine Jorgensen's autobiography *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* in 1967. This was followed by an array of similar publications in America. Renée Richards' *Second Serve: The Renee Richards Story* (1983) and Nancy Hunt's *Mirror Image* (1978) were two other autobiographies that captured the transsexual experience. While the well-publicized autobiographies by Jorgensen, Morris, and Richards drew attention to the experiences of transsexual women, the lack of published narratives by transsexual men meant that their lives remained largely invisible from the 1960s through the 1980s. One notable exception is *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography* (1977) by Mario Martino.

During the 1990s' the use of the term transgender underwent an ideological change. From a term referring to transformation, it became one referring to crossing, going beyond or through gender. The 1990s also witnessed the publication of a few

pathbreaking texts that revolutionized the notion of gender. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is the most prominent one among them. Sandy Stone's essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto", usually regarded as officiating the inauguration of transgender studies, reconceptualized transsexuals as "outside the gender boundary". It made a clarion call of change when Stone asked transsexuals to own their histories and write their stories to refute the stories engineered by the medical professionals and hegemonic gender discourse rooted in dichotomy. Holly Boswell's article "The Transgender Alternative" published in 1991 acted as a manifesto of the ideological underpinnings of the term 'transgender'. According to her transgender is a "viable option between a cross-dresser and transsexual person, which also happens to have a firm foundation in the ancient tradition of androgyny." She calls transgender as people with a "vision that transcends", as people who acts as "makers of our culture" by expressing their authentic selves rather than merely conforming to societal expectations. Boswell referred to transgender as individuals in a state of transition in a broader evolutionary context (Boswell 15-17). She professed androgyny over gender dichotomy as a way to end stereotypic role-playing.

The 1990s also witnessed the publication of Leslie Feinberg's trailblazing ideas in hir pamphlet, "Transgender Liberation: A Movement whose Time has Come" which popularized the term "transgender" as an umbrella term to include gender variant people in 1992 and *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* in 1993 which traced the historical context of trans oppression in white Eurocentric capitalist social structures and documented how the presence of gender variant people in varied cultures and ethnicities was revered before the colonial advent. Her autofiction *Stone Butch Blues* published in 1993 is known for its outlandish depiction of gender ambiguity embraced by Jess, the central character

against the gender-distinctive identity promoted by the earlier trans autobiographies. Imbibing inspiration from such paradigm shifts, Kate Bornstein came up with her revolutionary part gender studies, part memoir *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* in 1994 which altogether negated the stereotypical gender portrayals of the earlier texts in favour of the rest of humanity who are neither masculine nor feminine. This trend took momentum in the 21st century when more and more trans people came up with their stories of gender exploration. Replacing the usual migrating stories of the ancestors, these writers presented stories that transcended the gender-sex dichotomy.

The present study attempts to read the select 21st-century American trans life narratives *Becoming a Visible Man* (2004) by Jamison Green, *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: A Memoir* (2012) by Kate Bornstein, *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (2014) by Janet Mock, *Sissy: A Coming of Gender Story* (2019) by Jacob Tobia, and *Fairest: A Memoir* (2020) by Meredith Talusan in the context of this paradigm shift. The study will probe deep into the posttranssexual ideologies conveyed by these narratives about sex, gender, and sexuality. The authors selected represent a cross-section of the trans spectrum. Jamison Green, an American transgender activist and author working for ensuring civil rights, legal security, and medical access for transgender and transsexual people, is a bisexually oriented trans man who medically transitioned from female to male. He openly declared his identity as a trans man as early as 1980 and became one of the pioneering trans men to do so at that time. He is actively involved in transgender policymaking. His life narrative *Becoming a Visible Man* published in 2004 combines his personal experience of transition and his broader political commentary on the status of trans people especially that of trans men in society.

Kate Bornstein, though a medically transitioned trans woman, describes herself as nonbinary. She is a lesbian practising sadomasochism. She prefers to be identified as transgressively gendered. Her book *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (1994) is considered as a pathbreaking one in the canon of trans life narratives and one of the early texts to reject gender specificity in favour of gender flexibility. The text chosen for the current study *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: A Memoir* published in 2012 is an honest account of Bornstein's journey to gender transgression. Unlike her earlier book *Gender Outlaw*, this text adopts the narrative structure of a more conventional memoir and details her experience with her gender identity from a shy Jewish boy to that of a gender non-binary.

Janet Mock is a heterosexual trans woman of colour. She represents the racial and economic marginalization and exclusion experienced by trans of colour in the canon of predominant Eurocentric white upper-class trans theorizations. Apart from making her presence felt as a transgender activist, Mock is also a director, producer, television host and actor. Her father is an African American and she was born and brought up in Hawaii, one of the earliest American states to grant equal civil rights to gender minority people and legalize same-sex marriage. People with homosexual and bisexual orientations known as 'aikane' and people of third gender known as 'mahu' were common in Hawaiian culture. Mock thus represents the long legacy of gender-variant people in pre-colonial cultures. Her life narrative *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* published in 2014 is a truthful account of her experience of growing up as a poor, coloured, multicultural trans in America. She published her second memoir, *Surpassing Certainty* in 2017.

Jacob Tobia is a gender nonconforming trans who, though assigned male at birth identifies as a woman and cross-dresses. Tobia prefers to be identified with the

gender-neutral pronoun ‘they’. Tobia has not resorted to medical transition and prefers to be identified as genderqueer. Their memoir *Sissy: A Coming of Gender Story* was a national bestseller in 2019. The book hilariously recounts the process of Tobia coming to terms with their gender variance and associated trauma. Meredith Talusan is a Filipino American nonbinary bisexual transgender. She describes herself as a queer albino first-generation Filipino immigrant and is comfortable with gender-specific as well as gender-neutral pronouns. Talusan represents the non-American ethnic minority. She is coloured, disabled, and trans. Thus, she represents the intersections of race, gender and sexuality. Her memoir *Fairest: A Memoir* published in 2020 traces her journey from the Philippines as a boy with Albinism to America to embrace her trans

woman identity. Apart from the select trans life narratives mentioned above, the trans life narratives written during and after the 1950s’ were also read to make a comparative analysis. The two representative texts chosen were Christine Jorgensen’s *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* published in 1967 and Renee Richards’ *Second Serve: The Renee Richards Story* published in 1983.

The methodology of textual analysis and auto/biography method are followed in this study. Auto/biography method as a research tool holds significance since “the search in auto/biography transformed from a search for the person to a search for a convincing reading. Where once the search was for greater information about the person, now it has shifted to a search for an interpretation of how the individual could be located within a particular Zeitgeist” (Evans 33). Auto/biography studies thus investigates how a particular identity emerged in a particular social, cultural, historical, and geographical context. Hence, as stated by Mary Evans, “one of the most important aspects of researching for an auto/biography is the establishment of

the relationship between author, subject and culture” by considering the author of the auto/biography as the “hidden subject” of the study (43). The second major aspect of auto/biography method as a research tool is to investigate “what is not said, what cannot be said and what we can never know” within an autobiography to unmask the motive behind the many “silences” evident in a life narrative (Evans 43). The chosen texts were subjected to close reading to analyse the content and explicate the process of identity formation and its implications on individuals and society at large.

Since transgender studies demand an interdisciplinary approach, the current study has gathered information from diverse sources and disciplines like psychiatry, medicine, sociology, and queer theory apart from that of gender and transgender studies. To understand the social construction of trans identity, this study has made extensive use of theorizations from sociology especially that of Aron Devor (“Witnessing and Mirroring: A Fourteen Stage Model of Transsexual Identity Formation” (2004)), Dave King and Richard Ekins (*Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing* (1996), *The Transgender Phenomenon* (2006) as well as from social psychologists Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna (*Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (1978). At the same time, the focus of the study remains to be trans subjectivities and trans lives as it was researched and theorized by transgender studies and gender studies as well as by trans people themselves.

The basic theoretical postulates of this research are derived from texts by transgender theorist like “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” (1987) by Sandy Stone, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology and the Idea of Gender* (1995) by Bernice Hausman, *Transgender History* (2008) by Susan Stryker, *Transgender Studies Reader Vol 1* (2006) by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle and

Transgender Studies Reader Vol 2 (2013) by Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura, “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come” (1992), *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc Marsha P Johnson and Beyond* (1996), and *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) by Leslie Feinberg, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (1994) by Kate Bornstein, *Second Skins :The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998) by Jay Prosser, *Trans :A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (2018) by Jack Halberstam, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (2002) by Joanne Meyerowitz, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (1992) by Marjorie Garber, *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (1991) by Julia Epstein and Christina Straub, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (2000) by Viviane K. Namaste, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (2017) by Julia Serano, “Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance” (2014) by Talia Mae Bettcher, and *The Transgender Body Politics* (2020) by Heather Brunskell Evan, among others. The gender performative theory of Judith Butler explicated in her texts *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1996) and *Undoing Gender* (2004) and Foucault’s ideas on discourse and the history of sexuality as explained in his *The History of Sexuality Vol 1* (1976) are also followed to understand the transgender trajectories.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters with an introduction, four core chapters, a conclusion, and a chapter on recommendations. Chapter I, “Historical Dialogues: The Emergence of Trans Identity Discourse” is the introductory chapter on the origin and evolution of trans discourses and transgender identity in social, cultural, medical, psychiatric, and literary discourses with special focus on American trans

theorizations. The earlier assumptions of sex and gender as synonymous and the subsequent development of gender studies as a distinct branch leading to the emergence of transgender as different from homosexual are also discussed in detail. The focus of this chapter is on the emergence of trans life writing as a major mode of transgender discourse in America. Chapter I also sets forth the research problem, the methodology adopted in the study and the design of the thesis as well as a brief description of the subsequent chapters.

In an attempt to trace the paradigm shift that revolutionized the academic debates on transgender studies in 1990 and the subsequent critique of the earlier trans life narratives that came into being, chapter II “Narrating the Trans Self: Contextualising Early Trans Life Narratives”, probes deep into the nature of trans identity projected in the early trans life narratives. With the advent of the posttranssexual turn in the 1990s posited by Sandy Stone, the earlier trans life narratives were revisited by transgender theorists and transpeople alike. The gender essentialist tone of such narratives was exposed and critiqued and their failure to erect a counter-narrative to the hegemonic heteronormative social structure was widely discussed. This chapter offers an overview of the literature produced in this regard with special focus on Sandy Stone, Bernice Hausman, and Jay Prosser. The chapter also delves deep into the mode of trans identity construction adopted by earlier trans life narratives by taking instances from Christine Jorgensen’s *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* and Renee Richards’ *Second Serve: The Renee Richards Story*. The gender conformist modes of narration found in these texts about body, gender and sexuality are subjected to critical reading to analyse how the texts of the 21st century differed from this mode of trans subjectivity construction. The chapter also attempts to describe the theoretical postulates regarding life writing with a special

focus on *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in an attempt to place trans life narratives in its context.

The third, fourth, and fifth chapters offer a posttranssexual reading of the select 21st century American trans life narratives. The texts chosen are *Becoming a Visible Man* (2004) by Jamison Green, *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: A Memoir* (2012) by Kate Bornstein, *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (2014) by Janet Mock, *Sissy: A Coming of Gender Story* (2019) by Jacob Tobia, and *Fairest: A Memoir* (2020) by Meredith Talusan.

The third chapter “Man, Woman, and Trans: Transcending Gender Binary and Stereotyping” explores the dynamics of gender identity as presented in 21st century trans life writings. An important purview of the chapter is the delineation of the rejection of gender binary and stereotyping in the select texts as against the reinvigoration of the same found in early trans life narratives. The theories on gender offered by Judith Butler, Dave King, Richard Ekins, Suzanne Kessler, and Wendy McKenna are extensively used in contextualizing the gender sensibilities offered by the select writers to resist the binarist norms of gender seen in earlier texts.

The fourth chapter titled “Becoming Trans: Body as a Site of Contestation” discusses the treatment of trans body in the select texts in comparison to the wrong body narratives offered by earlier authors. The first part of the chapter explores the circumstances that led to the emergence of the wrong body model of trans life narratives. Various social, cultural, medical, and psychiatric developments contributing to this mode of narration are discussed here. The second part of the chapter discusses the factors contributing to the paradigm shift and the denial of wrong body narration by the 21st century trans life narrators. The theoretical postulates of Aron Devor, Jonathan Ames, Anne Bolin, Talia Mae Bettcher, and Sara Ray

Rondot form the base of the discussion offered in the fourth chapter.

The fifth chapter is titled “The Trans Desire: Revisionary Notions of Trans Sexuality”. This chapter interrogates the compulsory compartmentalization of trans desire to the heterosexual matrix by the heteronormative society which was supported and propagated by early writers and argues for the rejection of the same in favour of more flexible codes of sexuality found in recent narratives. This chapter draws considerably from Butler’s idea of the heterosexual matrix and Foucault’s notions of sexuality. The authors chosen for the study identify themselves as representing the varied forms of sexualities to explore their subjectivities and thus posit an argument against the stipulated norms of medico-psychological discourses pertaining to the sexuality of ‘true transgender’ that promoted a form of transnormativity in support of the heteronormative agenda.

The sixth chapter concludes the findings of the study and restates how the variegated non-normative gender identities discussed in the thesis brought in an ideological shift in the way transgender sensibilities and subjectivities are formulated and propagated in the 21st century. The conventional notions of body, self, and desire that define an individual’s gender identity have been revolutionized by these narratives. The authors chosen represent the rainbow spectrum of genders and sexualities that characterize the 21st century. Some of these authors chose medical transition whereas some others chose to celebrate the in-betweenness or the liminality of their gender manifestation. Some are androgynous whereas some transcend the norms of the gender binary. The thesis concludes with the seventh chapter on recommendations based on the current study. This thesis is an attempt to reinstate the centrality of trans identities and their lived experience in transgender studies by focusing on trans life narratives. It also attempts to postulate the idea that gender is a

flexible and fluid aspect of an individual's self-perception devoid of a direct connection to one's biology and sexuality.

Chapter II

Narrating the Trans Self: Contextualising Early Trans Life

Narratives

I could not ask a transsexual for anything more inconceivable than to forgo passing, to be consciously “read,” to read oneself aloud-and by this troubling and productive reading, to begin to write oneself into the discourses by which one has been written- in effect, then, to become a (look out-dare I say it again?) posttranssexual.

(Stone 299)

Katy Steinmetz in her article “America’s Transition”, published in the June 2014 issue of *Time* magazine popularized the phrase “Transgender Tipping Point” to refer to the increased visibility of transgender people in popular culture, a unique characteristic of the 21st century. Visibility is often considered a sign of progress and acceptance. According to Steinmetz trans people are “emerging from the margins to fight for an equal place in society.” Though Steinmetz’s rationale of increased trans visibility as an indication of wider social acceptance for trans appears to be simple, the notion of trans visibility is problematic especially when certain types of trans narratives become more visible and more favoured in popular culture over the others. The ones that gain acceptance are those that conform to the stereotypes of sex and gender, mostly the conventional transition narratives that celebrate the heterosexual man and the heterosexual woman. Other types of trans subjectivities remain largely invisible and liminal.

The increased visibility of trans identities during the early 21st century as well as universal access to digital resources in the US made every transgender person and those interested in the transgender phenomenon a historian. Most of them tried to

document the trans journey in forms digital as well as written. The explosion in the number of trans narratives in print and visual formats testifies this. One of the popular genres of such cultural productions that depicted trans lives was the life narratives authored by transpeople. But as stated by Jamison Green in his *Investigation into Discrimination against Transgendered People* published by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission in 1994, “Both the news media and entertainment media tend to perpetuate stereotypes in their coverage or treatment of transgendered persons and issues. The ill-informed biases expressed in the media then become a sanction perpetuating discrimination” (Green and Brinkin 45). Critical engagement with such literary productions is essential in making a reverse transgender discourse.

The institutionalization of trans scholarship and identity construction started appearing only after the 1990s. Until then the transgender movement was an often-neglected branch of lesbian, gay, and queer movements. Most of the narratives about the transgender phenomenon were constructed either by the scientific discourses objectifying trans experience or by feminist or queer discourses condemning their embodied experience. As stated by Viviane K. Namaste, queer theory “does not account for the quotidian living conditions of transgender people” (16) and “a rejection of queer theory based on such a political argument is both worthy and warranted” (Namaste 23). Namaste also rejects the theoretical terms of debate on transgender people offered by critics like Judith Butler (1990) and Marjorie Garber (1991) during the 1990s’ in the cultural context of America as terms “wherein the voices, struggles and joys of real transgendered people in the everyday social world are noticeably absent” (Namaste 16). This negation of the trans community by the established modes of theoretical discourses demanded the emergence of a mode of trans utterance offered by themselves that depicted the truth of trans existence.

Notably, until the early nineties, autobiography was the only medium by which transsexuals documented and communicated their experiences. Life writings such as full-length autobiographies, memoirs, diary/journal entries, and Obligatory Transsexual File (O.T.F) (Stone, 4) can be considered as the first modes of cultural production by transgender people about themselves. Initially used by the state to initiate exclusionary practices, such confessional narratives were later brilliantly redefined by trans people in their favour. According to Joanne Meyerowitz, transgender history is predominantly one of the mass media and trans life writings (Meyerowitz, "Sex Change" 161). The long array of trans self-narratives that contributed towards the canon of transgender discourse proves this.

David McCooley in his article "The Limits of Life Writing" states that it is the very limits that brought the field of life writing studies into being. The shift from autobiography study to life writing study during the 21st century was the direct outcome of the theoretical understanding of the exclusionary nature of the conventional definitions of autobiography as well as the need to address previously silenced subjects in the canon of autobiography like "women, people of colour, Indigenous peoples, and (more recently) children." McCooley states that "Such life-writing theory began from a critique of the human subject (simultaneously universalised and limited as male, European, self-present and autonomous), reconfiguring subjectivity as diverse, provisional and intersubjective" (277).

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their text *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* expose the limitations of traditional autobiography. Smith and Watson argue that in its conventional sense autobiography referred to a writing practice that emerged during the Enlightenment period that "privileges the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story as the definitive achievement

of life writing” (Smith and Watson 3). But the canon of representative self-writing was challenged during the wake of post-modern and post-colonial critiques for its assumption that “many other kinds of life writings produced at the same time have lesser value and were not ‘true’ autobiography — the slave narrative, narratives of women’s domestic lives, coming- of- age and travel narratives, among others.” Such critiques resulted in a shift from autobiography as a genre to life writings as a discourse, to the practice of “discursive formations of truth-telling” (Smith and Watson 3) based on the recognition “that those whose identities, experiences, and histories remain marginal, invalidated, invisible, and partial negotiate and alter normative or traditional frames of identity in their differences (Qtd. in Smith and Watson 5). In contrast to the traditional autobiographies featuring autonomous subjects, trans autobiographies present a distinct perspective. These narratives are composed by individuals who were previously silenced in the established canon of autobiographical literature and hence demand a deeper analysis within the framework of the discourse of life writing. Trans life writings can thus be considered as a discursive practice of constructing the truth about trans identity which was hitherto ignored by the dominant forms of discourses. According to David McCooey, “Emergent forms of LGBTQIA life writing highlight discursive limits by deconstructing heteronormative assumptions and mainstream representations of non-heterosexual identities” (279).

For a trans person, the task of writing life narratives is loaded with the political responsibility of bringing their invalidated and marginalized histories to the centre. Rather than commemorating the accomplishments of an acclaimed individual, trans life narratives assume the historical role of chronicling the collective history of a community. In the “Preface” to her life narrative, Christine Jorgensen states that the

purpose of writing her story was to “bury once and for all the rumours, speculations, untruths, and misconceptions” (Jorgensen xvii) which surrounded her for a decade and thereby help “the men and women who struggle to adjust to sex roles unsuited to them” (Jorgensen xvii). Jorgensen expected her life narrative to voice the concerns of her community as a whole rather than narrating her personal history. For trans, the very act of life writing thus becomes a form of resistance. The extent to which trans life writings could accomplish this purpose has been a topic of debate which began simultaneously with the production of trans self-narratives.

As stated by David McCooey, the change from autobiography study to life writing study has brought multiple narrative forms and mediums to the ever-expanding list of life writing such as graphic, audio-visual and transmedial forms. These include “graphic memoir (or comics more generally), photography, auto/biographical film and video and social media” (McCooey 278). Smith and Watson define life writing as a “general term for writing that takes a life, one’s own or another’s, as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or explicitly self-referential and therefore autobiographical” and life narratives as a “general term for acts of self-presentation of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producer’s life as their subject, whether written, performative, visual, filmic, or digital” (4). While Smith and Watson limit life writing to include written forms of representation and life narratives to autobiographical acts of any sort, McCooey’s definition treats life writing and life narrative synonymously to include written and visual modes of representation. This thesis follows McCooey’s definition and uses the terms ‘life writing’ and ‘life narrative’ synonymously. The changed narrative modes adopted by trans self-narratives after the 1990s are reflective of this paradigm shift from autobiography to life writing. Having evolved beyond the conventional

autobiography, the genre of trans life narratives has embraced memoirs, encouraging readers to contemplate the significance of this shift and the unique reading experience it offers (Smith and Watson 4). Additionally, it has ventured into diverse forms such as autofiction, autoethnography, graphic narratives, films, vlogs, and television reality series focused on the theme of transition.

The mass media projection of sex change surgeries and its infinite possibilities reached America during the 1930s, especially after the publication of the English translation of Lili Elbe's transition story *Man into Woman* in 1933. Sensational magazines and tabloid newspapers published articles on how 'science corrected the mistake of nature' in Lili Elbe. All media accounts presented her as intersex and depicted surgery as a miracle that brought out the hidden true sex of an individual. The media frenzy over sex transformation reached its peak when Christine Jorgensen returned to America after her transition from Copenhagen. Media portrayals of Jorgensen varied from time to time. Initially, she was a hermaphrodite, then a transvestite and finally the *New York Post* declared her as "physically . . . a normal male" before her treatment, and now a castrated male, with no added female organs (qtd. in Meyerowitz, "Sex Change" 173). Despite all such stories Jorgensen continued to be a sensation and a star and inspired a lot more like-minded people with her courage and transition. In 1953 she published an account of her life in the *American Weekly* titled "The Story of My Life". In 1967 Jorgensen published her full-length autobiography, *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* which served as a source of inspiration and a how-to-guide book to those who wanted a solution for their gender issues. The book sold over 450000 copies.

Though there were autobiographies published by transsexual people in Europe like Lili Elbe's biography *Man into Woman*, Robert Allen's *But for the Grace: The*

True Story of a Dual Existence, Roberta Cowell's *Roberta Cowell's Story*, and Heidi Jo Star's *I Changed My Sex*, the publication of Jorgensen's autobiography gave birth to a new era of trans life writings in America. In the opinion of Joanne Meyerowitz, the history of American trans life writings thus divided itself into Before Christine (BC) and After Christine (AC) ages. She says, "With the Jorgensen story, the floodgates broke. A torrent of new stories on other transsexuals made sex change a constant feature in the popular press As with earlier accounts of sex change, transgendered people responded to the stories, but in Jorgensen's case in particular, non transgendered people responded as well" (Meyerowitz 53).

From the 1980s onwards there was a steady increase in the number of trans life writings. Canary Conn's *Canary: The Story of a Transsexual* (1974), Mario Martino's *Emergence: A Transsexual Autobiography* (1977), Renee Richards' *Second Serve: The Renee Richards Story* (1983), Jan Morris' *Conundrum: An Extraordinary Narrative of Transsexualism* (1987), and Deidre McCloskey's *Crossing: A Memoir* (1999) are a few prominent narratives published during the 20th century. The number of transgender autobiographies proliferated during the 21st century giving indications that trans life writings will hold a major share of transgender scholarship in the 21st century.

The publication of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* in 1993 and Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* published in 1994 gave a new direction to trans life narratives published later in the 21st century. Personal experience of being a trans found expression not just in conventional memoirs or autobiographies. Even theoretical discourses on trans relied heavily on personal experience indicating the fact that life narratives would remain the dominant mode of trans discourse in the 21st century. Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On Men,*

Women and the Rest of Us (1994), Julia Serano's influential *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (2007) and *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (2013) by Paul B Preciado are instances of the structural framework of life narratives being used in texts dealing with trans theorizations. These authors blended their subjective experiences, gender theory, and cultural analysis of gender performance in a manner that blurred the lines between theory and memoir.

Apart from such experimental attempts to incorporate subjective experience in theorization, the 21st century also witnessed an abundance in the publication of memoirs and autobiographies. Jennifer Finney Boylan's *She is not There: A Life in Two Genders* (2003), Jamison Green's *Becoming a Visible Man* (2004), Matt Kailey's *Just Add Hormones: An Insider's Guide to the Transsexual Experience* (2005), Max Wolf Valerio's *The Testosterone Files: My Hormonal and Social Transformation from Female to Male* (2006), Chaz Bono's *Transition: The Story of How I Became a Man* (2011), Jay Ladin's *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey between Genders* (2012), Kate Bornstein's *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: A Memoir* (2012), Everett Maroon's *Bumbling into Body Hair: A Transsexual's Memoir* (2012), Janet Mock's *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, love & So Much More* (2014), Thomas Page McBee's *Man Alive: A True Story of Violence, Forgiveness and Becoming a Man* (2014), Laura Jane Grace's *Tranny: Confessions of a Punk-Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout* (2016), Jazz Jennings's *Being Jazz: My Life as Transgender Teen* (2016), Caitlyn Jenner's *The Secrets of My Life* (2017), Sarah McBride's *Tomorrow will be Different: Love, Loss and the Fight for Trans Equality* (2018), Jacob Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* (2019), Maia Kobabe's *Gender Queer: A Memoir* (2019), Meredith Tausan's *Fairest: A Memoir*

(2020), and George M Johnson's *All Boys aren't Blue* (2020) are a few of the popular trans life narratives published during the early decades of the 21st century.

Unlike the other modes of cultural productions like novels or fictional films which are products of imagination, life narratives with their truth claims influence the way in which a culture develops ideology. There is a tendency to consider autobiographical texts as historical documents and the "facts" provided by the subject of the text as not just the facts about him or her but as the history of the particular time, place, and events mentioned in the text. Readers tend to transfer the subjective truth provided by the autobiographer to encompass the larger context of historical facts. The same is true regarding trans life writings and visual texts produced on trans identity. The kind of trans subjectivity produced by early trans life narrators thus came to be understood by society as the historical fact about transgender identity formation. The acceptance these life narratives received within the transgender community adds to the significant role these texts had in defining trans subjectivity for people experiencing gender identity discord. The gender essentialist, transnormative selves portrayed in the early trans life narratives by the upper-class white European trans women came to be widely accepted as the ideal trans self not just by the cissexist society but also by the transgender community struggling to come to terms with their gender identity conflicts. The then transgender community followed the ideological underpinnings of these narratives hoping to reach a viable, socially acceptable sex-gender alignment that will render their subjectivities culturally and historically intelligible. These monolithic narratives thus came to reflect the ideologies and interests of the transgender community in general thus regressively affecting the construction of a resistance trans narrative. By the 1990s critics started questioning the practice of accepting the subjective truth claims of early trans

autobiographers as the collective historical fact. According to Smith and Watson, life narratives along with “making history”, also project and justify the narrators’ perceptions and at times invent “desirable futures” for themselves. Hence, “The complexity of autobiographical texts requires reading practices that reflect on the narrative tropes, sociocultural contexts, rhetorical aims, and narrative shifts within the historical or chronological trajectory of the text” (Smith and Watson 10).

By the 1990s, scholars introduced revisionary reading practices that delved profoundly into the effectiveness of these early trans life narratives in critiquing the dominant master narratives of heteronormativity. Viviane K. Namaste in one of the footnotes provided in her introduction to *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* stated that she is not interested in the personal history of the writers she engages with in her text since she intends to make a critical intervention in the available knowledge on transgender cultural production, not a personal narrative. Namaste says, “An academic text on transsexuality and the institutional world that does not address the transsexual author’s personal history, then, is a critical intervention in the existing knowledge paradigm” (1).

The statement is indicative of her opinion on the suspected failure of trans life writings to make a critical engagement with the kind of knowledge produced about them through such narratives. The capacity of trans life writings to expose the vulnerability of the dimorphic models of gendered existence was challenged by many theoreticians. Many such narratives confronted the criticism that they propagate the medical model of transnormativity. Transnormativity is “an ideology that structures trans identification, experience, and narratives into a *realness or trans enough* hierarchy that is heavily reliant on accountability to a medically based, heteronormative model” (Johnson 4-5). This becomes exclusionary and reductionist in

practice since it fails to represent those who were poor or black or socially and economically underprivileged with no access to surgical procedures. It also intensified the theoretical gap between the two oppositional modes of transgender identity; one that affirms the existing gender/sex categories but allows for a transition from one category to the other as a means to fit in and the other one that supported gender fluidity as a means of challenging heteronormative binaries. The former position represented the discourses of transsexuality and the latter related to the political position of being transgender. In this regard, Austin Johnson states that,

As a regulatory normative ideology, transnormativity should be understood alongside heteronormativity and homonormativity as both an empowering and constraining ideology that deems some trans people's identifications, characteristics, and behaviours as legitimate and prescriptive (e.g., those that adhere to a medical model) while others are marginalized, subordinated, or rendered invisible (e.g., those that do not adhere to a medical model). (Johnson 2-3)

Transnormativity served as a set of expectations dictating the preferred and socially acceptable trans identity, overlooking individual modes of trans identification and experiences and disregarding individual autonomy in deciding whether to pursue medical transition or not. Transnormativity thus refused to acknowledge the fact that the diverse ways in which a trans person perceives his or her gender identity and expression may not always align with the medical model of transsexuality.

As opposed to the medical model of transsexuality, transgender politics, like any other minority identity politics, wanted to generate new theoretical perspectives to look at and resist the dominant discourses on gender identity and thus envisage new possibilities for understanding trans identity. The emergence of theoretically grounded

transgender politics during the 1990s' questioned the kind of trans subjectivity projected in trans life narratives during the early 20th century thus further problematizing the process of trans identity formation. While some thinkers valued the early trans narratives as granting agency to trans in voicing their subjectivity, some others severely criticized such texts for echoing the prejudices of cissexist society. Some opined that such narratives ended up being body narratives while others critiqued them for promoting a medical model of transsexuality. Critics like Bernice Hausman and Sandy Stone felt unhappy with the politics of body transformation portrayed as the only way to fix transgender people while Jay Prosser took a positive stand by calling such transformations the truth of transsexual embodiment. Genny Beemyn in "Transsexual Autobiography" observes that all the transsexual life narratives published until the 1990s' narrated the same story,

from their earliest memories feeling themselves to be very different from others of their assigned gender, while growing up expressing themselves whenever possible as that different gender, learning about and meeting others of their gender identity, and eventually transitioning to their appropriate gender. (3)

Initially, trans life writings adopted the form of conventional autobiographies narrating their journey of life from the wrongly sexed body to the right one. They all portrayed gender as biologically based and a reconstruction of the body from a wrong anatomy to the right one as the only available means to tackle the gender identity confusion they confronted. They were mostly written by male-to-female transsexuals describing the moment of their surgery as one of rebirth. For instance, in her autobiography *Second Serve: The Renee Richards Story*, Renee titled the chapter that recounted her sex reassignment surgery as "Renee Richards/Richards Reborn"

(Richards 271). In this chapter, she portrays her choice to undergo medical transition as a “willing move” and likens her post-transition state to a state of rebirth. She states “When I awoke, I would be Renee. When I chose it as a child, I had not known the meaning of the name Renee. In that moment I savoured its significance, Renee. Reborn” (Richards 280). The pain she endured as part of her medical transition gets recontextualised as “Richard Henry Raskind’s death throe” (Richards 282). Such transnormative narratives influenced the construction of modern-day transgender identity. As stated by Joanne Meyerowitz,

In the history of transsexuality, marginalized subjects used available cultural forms to construct and reconfigure their own identities. . . . certain readers appropriated public stories of sex change and included the quest for surgical and hormonal transformation as a central component of their senses of self. (160-161)

Trans life writings have an autoethnographic purpose of describing themselves in ways that engage with and often reverse the narratives available about them. It was intended as a critical practice of ethically addressing and exposing the injustice and subjugation meted out on a living community by the hegemonic majority. But all the early narratives celebrated the regressive passage of medical transition in their narratives. From the wrong sex and right gender to the right sex and right gender was the normal course of journey that all these life narratives depicted. Once they realign their bodies, they reach their destination and ‘lived happily ever after’. All these autobiographers shared their subjective narratives, which did not collectively reflect the shared experiences of the transgender community as a whole. In short, all those narratives reiterated the dominant discourse of gender essentialism and failed to raise a counter-discourse to promote the cause of transgender identity politics. It was this

discursive context that necessitated the birth of a posttranssexual theory as proposed by Sandy Stone in her groundbreaking essay “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto.” Stone started writing the essay in the 1980s’, presented it for the first time at the “Other Voices, Other Worlds: Questioning Gender and Ethnicity” conference in 1988 and first published it in 1991. The essay provided an analysis of four well-known male-to-female trans life narratives from that period: *Man into Woman* by Lili Elbe, *I Changed My Sex* by Hedy Jo Star, *Conundrum* by Jan Morris, and *Canary: The Story of a Transsexual* by Canary Conn. The purpose was to investigate the gender essentialist and transnormative themes present in these narratives. According to Stone, all these narratives conformed to the heteronormative view of gender (Stone 285). The essay is considered as formative in the emergence of transgender identity discourses. It provided a post-structuralist approach towards gender through its proclamation to undo the binary structure of gender and thus offered new frontiers of existence to people who felt themselves to be differently gendered. In this seminal essay, Stone described the early trans life narratives as

culture speaking with the voice of an individual. The people who have no voice in this theorizing are the transsexuals themselves. As with males theorizing about women from the beginning of time, theorists of gender have seen transsexuals as possessing something less than agency. As with “genetic’ women,” transsexuals are infantilized, considered too illogical or irresponsible to achieve true subjectivity, or clinically erased by diagnostic criteria; or else, as constructed by some radical feminist theorists, as robots of an insidious and menacing patriarchy, an alien army designed and constructed to infiltrate, pervert and destroy “true” women. In this construction as well, the transsexuals have been resolutely complicit by failing to develop an effective

counter-discourse. (294)

According to Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, Sandy Stone used the term posttranssexual to refer to a political stance that would

explode the concept of the ‘transsexual’, then often perceived (particularly by the people who lived a transsexual life) as a restrictive category that required gender-changing people to be silent about their personal histories as the price of their access to the medical and legal procedures necessary for their own well-being. Her goal was to break that silence and transform what she called the “textual violence inscribed in the transsexual body” into a critical reconstructive force. (“Introduction” 3)

The essay was a definite answer to the allegations made by radical feminist discourses that deemed transsexuals as rapists of the female body. Stone’s essay was in particular a response to the American radical feminist Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (1979), which defined male-to-female transsexuality as a planned disguise of patriarchy to invade the feminist movement’s spaces. Janice Raymond’s allegation was inspired in part by her disagreement with Stone’s entry at the women-only collective Olivia Records. Citing this as an instance of male invasion of female-only spaces as constructed women, Raymond stated that “All transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves” (104).

Stone’s manifesto rejected Raymond’s allegation against transsexual women as “relentless totalization” (Raymond 298). According to Judith Shapiro, Raymond’s critique of trans women was inspired by her need to exclude male-to-female transsexuals from the category of women (258) and it exposed her essentialist attitude towards gender. Shapiro states, “In denying womanhood to transsexuals, Raymond

insisted on the physical limits of what can be accomplished through sex change operations and emphasized that male-to-female transsexuals can't, after all, have babies and don't have two X chromosomes" (259). At the same time, Stone acknowledged and critiqued the gender essentialist tone evident in transsexual life narratives and wanted transgender people to stop producing discourses that recursively rearticulated the damaged and biased norms of gender identity. Though transphobic in its treatment of transsexuals, an examination of early transgender life accounts will compel one to acknowledge Raymond's assertion regarding the medically constructed nature of transsexualism as

A web of patriarchally prescribed stereotypes that surround all facets of the transsexual issue: the way transsexuals speak about themselves and the reasons they give for wanting surgery; the accounts of family interaction; the gender identity clinic requirements that prescribe "passing" as masculine or feminine to "prove" transsexual status; psychological advice and treatment of adjudged child transsexuals; and testimony from acknowledged "experts" in the field, regarding the stereotypical behaviour of transsexuals. (Raymond 77)

In her essay, Stone defines the transsexual identity portrayed in the early trans life narratives as one that blurs the distinction between gender and sex "by confusing the performative character of gender with the physical fact" of sex, referring to their perceptions of their situation as being in the "wrong body" (282). After analysing the available British and American trans life writings, Sandy Stone traces certain aspects of colonial discourse inherent in trans scholarship too. She says that the course of development is the same in both colonial narratives and trans narratives, "The initial fascination with the exotic, extending to professional investigation; denial of subjectivity and lack of access to the dominant discourse; followed by a species of

rehabilitation” (294). Stone asked the transgender community to critically read aloud into the discourses by which the society constructed trans identity as subjugated and secondary (299). Stone’s critical reading of trans life writings imagined the birth of a new age of trans discourse capable of offering critical perspectives on gender and gender performance.

While Stone dismissed early trans life narratives as mere body narratives, Jay Prosser considered trans life narratives as a bridge to embodied reality. Prosser’s *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998) brought back the centrality of the body into studies on trans discourse at a time when post-structuralism and queer studies were actively deconstructing the gender-sex linkage. According to Jay Prosser, trans life narratives accorded trans people the position of being the authorial subject. Until then trans community was the objects of medico-psychiatric discourses on gender and sex. Prosser says,

Prioritizing transsexuals’ own accounts over the medico-discursive texts, I suggest that transsexual narratives place us in a stronger position to understand how dynamic and complex are the relations of authorship and authorization between clinicians and transsexuals and to re-examine the whole problematic of the subject’s construction in postmodern theory. (9)

At a time when trans life narratives were critiqued for being body narratives, Prosser argued for a different understanding of how transsexuals experience their embodiment. Prosser, in an attempt to voice the process of his transition from female to male, understood the lack of language or narratives that could meaningfully communicate his transition to the world. When other modes of transitions like cultural or racial crossings are easily articulated and openly discussed even as part of academia, gender crossing remained unspeakable and transition felt like a “gendered

nonzone” (Prosser 2). For Prosser, transition was an in-between space, one that threatens the foundations of identity that are perceived as essentially secure causing discomfort and anxiety to both the subject in transition and to the onlooker. Unlike other modes of transition, gender transition is physically embodied for Prosser. Hence body becomes the focal point of transition in transsexual narratives, says Prosser. Prosser also opined that there is an absence of articulation regarding bodily transitions and his book is a “deferred return in writing to that absent act of articulation” (Prosser 4).

A survey of the published trans life narratives during the 20th century will expose the predominant role played by trans body narratives in the canon of trans life writings. From Christine Jorgensen’s autobiography onwards, all the celebrated trans life narrators articulated their transition in terms of their bodies. Sandy Stone’s essay, “The Empire Strikes Back” was her response to this unnecessary and regressive confluence of gender and body that got featured in all the popular trans life narratives. Prosser considered transsexuality as a narrative work, a transformation of the body that requires the “remodelling of the life into a particular narrative shape” (Prosser 4). When critics like Bernice Hausman and Sandy Stone critiqued trans life narratives for being body narratives, Prosser’s attempt was to foreground the bodily matter of gender crossing because he felt that while academia is trying to grapple with forms of gendered transitions, transsexual stories of bodies in transition were ignored.

Prosser was extremely critical of Judith Butler’s brand of gender performativity which, he felt, ignored the somatic context of gender realization. He identified five dimensions of transsexual transitions which, in Prosser’s opinion, transgender studies largely ignored; conceptual, ontological, narratological, historical and geographic trope (Prosser 5). Queer theory with its aim to disengage gender from

sex resulted in a negation of the materiality of bodily transition that held a central position in transsexual narratives. Prosser opined that queer studies' focus was on transgender-those who cross gender- not on transsexual-those who cross sex (176). Prosser's text, *Second Skins*, on the conceptual level, is thus an attempt to introduce a change in the existing theoretical paradigms of trans discourse to allow space for the materiality of the transsexual experience.

In this regard, Prosser suggests a rejection of queer theory's postulate that sex and gender are socially constructed and a myth. Instead, he demands that transsexual narratives should be read in such a way that it appreciates physical transition as the "very route to identity and bodily integrity" (Prosser 6). While queer theory celebrated transition as the transgression of sex and gender system, Prosser prioritized the reality of somatic subjectivity to a transsexual. By citing instances from radical feminism and social science, Prosser explains how transsexuality was treated as an invention of medical science and transsexual as "consumers of simulated sex" (7). By defining the "transsexual" as the product of medical science, such theories, states Prosser, denied the transgender agency to define their subjectivities. Such constructionist theories, argues Prosser, failed to understand the fact that the transsexuals are not just the participants but also actors who have shaped medical practices as much as they have been shaped by them (Prosser 8). Prosser thus gives importance to the materiality of gendered crossing which was critiqued by Sandy Stone and Bernice Hausman as essentialist. On a conceptual level, Prosser is challenging queer theories' preference for the ambivalence of transgender bodies as a means to deconstruct the binaries of sex and gender. This approach places the transgender as subversive and pushes transsexuals as hegemonic "beyond or beneath its favoured terrain of gender performativity" (Prosser 6). Citing Leslie Feinberg's

autofiction *Stone Butch Blues*, Prosser differentiates between a transgender, queer, and transsexual narrative. He states that,

If the drive of conventional transsexual narratives is nostalgically toward home, identity, belonging in the body and in the world and that of queer performativity away from it-resisting domestication, upturning the grounds of identity politics then transgender would seem to contain important ambivalences about home and territory, belonging and political affiliation.
(177)

Prosser states that the physical transition that a transsexual undergoes is not merely an external transformation. It involves physical, social, and psychological changes that constitute transsexuality. Thus, trans embodiment, in its ontological sense presupposes much more than the body. On the psychological level, body becomes the container of an individual's inner sense regarding his gender. For some, it is the corporeality of the external body that functions to reassure his/her inner sense of being a man or woman. Body is also a social construct shaped, controlled, and influenced by the sociocultural context in which one lives. Hence for a transsexual, a transitioned body is that which helps to locate himself/herself within the heteronormative social structure.

Although acknowledging Prosser's argument that a transsexual individual pursuing physical changes seeks a sense of belonging within a gender by re-aligning with the rightly sexed body, there is disagreement concerning his assertion that a transgender person, who does not view medical transition as necessary to achieve their gender aspirations, exists in a state of liminality, ambivalence, and openness regarding their gendered sense of belonging. It leads to the prioritization of the transsexual over the transgender, a denial of the authenticity of the gendered

subjectivity of transgender by treating it as inferior, unreal, and abstract. Stone's demand for a posttranssexual ideology, a political stance that overthrows the centrality of the body in trans discourses gains significance here. Stone does not devalue transsexuals in her theory. Instead, she is asking them to get over their obsession with the transitioned body and their overt fascination with and simulation of stereotypical gender roles. Stone urges the trans community to erect a counter-discourse against the hegemony of gender dichotomy by rejecting the essentialist norms of gender and sex. Stone's posttranssexual theory asked transsexuals to forgo passing and make their presence visible so as to disrupt the very foundations of the hegemonic gender discourse which hitherto treated gender as a stable, natural, essential and invariable attribute of one's biology. When they pass by hiding their pre-transition history and by blindly copying the accepted cultural codes of gender, they are becoming complicit in the discourse that had oppressed them once.

From the perspective of social science, Dwight Billings and Thomas Urban stated that transsexualism is being commodified by the medical industry and transsexual is an ignorant consumer of medical services offered to safeguard gender binary. They opine, "In their desperation to pass, male-to-female patients try to effect a commodified image of femininity seen in television advertising. In so doing, many patients are themselves transformed into commodities, resorting to prostitution to pay their medical bills" (Billings and Urban 113). Bernice Hausman also expresses a similar discontent towards the then popular trans life narratives. According to Hausman, "What I find latent in these texts is not the possibility of an "authentic" account of the transsexual, nor a particularly subversive story about sexuality, but the idea of the transsexual subject as an engineered subject" (147). Hausman also exposes the deliberate omissions and manipulations done to favour the medical construction of

the transsexual in these narratives. Hausman refers to these narratives as “accounts of human engineering through medical technology” and explains that “The technological aspects of the transformations of “sex change” are rarely stressed in these autobiographies, and physical pain is often glossed over in favour of a quick remark concerning the “overwhelming success” of surgical and hormonal interventions (147-148).

Prosser denies such criticisms raised against the medical discourse on transsexuality in his attempt to foreground the transsexual’s felt need for a conventionally sexed body to match his/her gender preference. According to Prosser, all such constructionist arguments nullify transsexual agency. Prosser’s arguments in favour of bodily transformation hold relevance considering the autonomy and agency of an individual to decide and transform his body to fit his needs. This becomes problematic and essentialist when the transsexuals use the transitioned body and its physical, social, and psychological attributes to advance cissexist society’s claims on the fixed, natural, and immutable nature of gender and sex. The transitioned body in conventional transsexual narratives becomes a location to ascribe heteronormative norms. The early trans life narratives projected the physical dimension of transition relegating the psychological and sociological attributes to the background. They emphasised the move from the “wrong body” to the “rightly sexed body” as the only way to cure their gender disorder thus furthering the biological base of gender identity. This also jeopardized the lives of those who were either left behind in the process due to their social, racial, or economic status or those who decided not to change their body.

Considering transition in its narratological sense Prosser argues that “Transsexuality is a matter of constructing transsexual narrative before being

constructed through technology” (9). Prosser states that the medical construction of transsexuality depends on the individual’s ability to narrate a coherent transsexual experience and the authorization of their transsexuality through this narration.

Prosser’s chapter in *Second Skins* on transsexual autobiography titled “Mirror Image: Transsexuality and Autobiography” provides a detailed explanation of his argument that a transsexual is not the product of medical science but a product of his/her own account of their gendered embodiment which prompts medical science to grant them the transsexual status. Hence according to Prosser, the identity called “transsexual” is a product of a narrative. The published autobiography of a transsexual is the second retelling of their story. The first occurs at the clinician’s office where, in order to be diagnosed as transsexual, he/she must recount an autobiography that substantiates his/her persistent cross-gender identification. Hence,

Whether s/he publishes an autobiography or not, then, every transsexual, as a transsexual, is originally an autobiographer. Narrative is also a kind of second skin: the story the transsexual must weave around the body in order that this body may be read. (Prosser 101)

The published autobiography is thus a redoubling of the oral narrative that played the most vital role in sanctioning the individual the status of a transsexual, “mirroring, reproducing, that first oral autobiographical scene” (Prosser 101). Though Prosser’s statement is used by him to substantiate his claim that it is not the medical narrative that produces a transsexual, but the agency of the transsexual narrative that leads medical science to produce a transsexual, it leaves space to challenge the authenticity of this oral autobiography that gives birth to a transsexual considering the fact that every self-narrative is a product of the times in which it was written.

Contrary to Prosser’s claim of an authentic transsexual narrative leading to medical

transition, it was the faithful reproduction of the available medical narratives on the criteria to be fulfilled by an individual seeking access to medical transition that led to the construction of a transsexual identity. Harry Benjamin's Standards of Care (SoC) which became the officially approved criteria for categorizing one as transsexual became the sourcebook of transsexuality not just for medical professionals, but for those who wanted medical transition. This became the reference point for medical professionals as well as for transsexual people who wished for corrective surgeries. In 1979 Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, which later got renamed as the World Professional Association of Transgender Health published the first edition of Standards of Care (SoC) which, with further editions being published in 1980, 1981, 1990, 1998 2001 and 2011 and the draft of the latest 8th edition in December 2021 became the clinical guidelines for the treatment of transsexuals by medical and psychological experts.

SoC up to the 6th edition defined transsexuality as a mental disorder to be treated in the body in three stages-psychotherapy to diagnose the illness, hormonal treatment as the first phase of transition and sex reassignment surgery as the last phase leading to the correction of the disorder. Both the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* and the Standards of Care refused to acknowledge people who identify as the other gender but are either unwilling or unable to medically transform their sex as "true transsexuals". The medical discourse on transsexuality available during the 20th century placed the body as an object to be studied and controlled within the premises of the dominant culture instead of treating the body as a subject of culture. Since telling the right story of gender, which undoubtedly was the one produced by medical experts, was essential to gain access to surgery, transsexuals mostly repositioned their personal history to match the official one. Sandy Stone's and Bernice Hausman's

observations in this regard shed light on the hegemonic hold medical discourse had on the construction of the transsexual entity during the early phase of trans emergence. Stone while discussing the striking similarity between the prescribed and presented gender behaviour states that,

It took a surprisingly long time-several years-for the researchers to realize that the reason the candidates' behavioural profiles matched Benjamin's so well was that the candidates, too, had read Benjamin's book, which was passed from hand to hand within the transsexual community, and they were only too happy to provide the behaviour that led to acceptance for surgery. (291)

Bernice Hausman refers to transsexual autobiographers as the “notoriously well-read patient population” who “serve to encourage and enable transsexual subjects to conform to the parameters of an established ‘transsexual personal history’ in order to obtain the desired medical treatment” (143). For instance, Renee Richards expresses her fascination for Dr. Benjamin and his research in her life narrative and states that she had “repeatedly seen articles about Dr. Harry Benjamin the man who coined the word “transsexual” (161). She openly expresses her respect for the man who “treated Christine Jorgensen” and was continuing his work to help “sexually misplaced persons” (Richards 161). While she never explicitly states having read Dr. Harry Benjamin's *Standards of Care* in this section, her account of her consultation with Dr. Benjamin to address her gender discord, which is provided later in the same chapter, hints at the influence Dr. Harry Benjamin and his research had on her. The description goes as follows,

As he listened to me reviewing my history, he tilted his head first one way and then another, sometimes nodding agreeably. Occasionally when I would grope for words, he would supply them so casually that I didn't notice at first. Then I

began to realize that this old man really did understand, so much so that he could probably have told the story without my help. (Richards 164)

The description of the interview reveals the collaborative process that took place between Renee and Dr. Harry Benjamin, in formulating a viable narrative that would meet the criteria for medical transition. Dr. Benjamin approved whatever Renee said and casually contributed words and phrases to narrate her oral autobiography whenever she groped for words. Renee's remark that Dr. Benjamin could have recounted the story even without her assistance highlights the uniform nature of the narratives shared by all those who sought surgery. It suggests a monolithic pattern in the stories told by individuals seeking medical transition. Prosser's argument of transsexual oral autobiography as instrumental in the construction of the transsexual thus holds no ground. In the retelling of this same medical narrative as published autobiography, these authors precluded the possibility of the production of a counter-narrative since those who identified with these celebrity transsexual life narrators relied on their stories to reach the destination of medical transition. In the opinion of Bernice Hausman,

While transsexual autobiographies may not be representative of the experiences of many (or even most) transsexual subjects, they are indicative of the establishment of an official discourse (or set of discourses) regulating transsexual self-representations and, therefore, modes of transsexual subjectivity. The autobiographical texts help institute a certain discursive hegemony within a community whose members have a substantial investment in mimicking the enunciative modality of those who have been successful in achieving sex transformation. Collecting the autobiographies of successful transsexuals—either through personal contact or by print media—constitutes

an important part of transsexual self-construction, self-education, and self-preparation for encounters with clinic personnel. (142-143)

The heteronormative transsexual subjectivities constructed and propagated through early life narratives in which “authentic experience is replaced by a particular kind of story, one that supports the old, constructed positions (was) expensive, and profoundly disempowering” for the trans people as a community (Stone 295). Another argument Prosser puts forward in his text to establish transsexuals as individuals with agency is the historical aspect of transition. He says that physical transitions were there even before the medical industry’s invention of hormone therapy or plastic surgery to change sex and hence it cannot be reduced to either technological or discursive effect” (10). But the 20th century trans life narrators placed themselves within the context of the medical discourse on transsexuality, conceived themselves as patients in need of medical cure and attained the same through sex reassignment surgery. Christine Jorgensen, for instance, defines herself as “Physically ... an underdeveloped male” and considered her male organs as “nature’s mistake” (Jorgensen 65). She found salvation for her sexual disorder in “the science of body chemistry” (Jorgensen 71). Her narrative reverberates with names like Dr. Christine Hamburger, the Danish endocrinologist who pioneered research on human sex hormones and Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, the German sex pathologist thus binding her journey of gender incongruity with the realms of medical science. Post-surgery they refused to have any link with those who occupied a space between or outside the gender binary. They refused to acknowledge kinship with gender variant identities that existed prior to sexologists’ theorization of gender variance and who never sought somatic transition. Following medical transition, the insistence of transsexuals on being labelled as "real men/women" within the binary framework reflects how 20th-

century transsexuality had become a product of medical science.

The fifth dimension of transition discussed by Prosser is the notion of a gendered home that transsexuals are critiqued for seeking. The posttranssexual, the ideological position that rejects passing in favour of visibility, as introduced by Stone, is an attempt to queer transsexuality, says Prosser. According to him, “If passing is intrinsic to transsexuality, in the transgender movement passing has become a marker of cultural abjection” (Prosser 173). According to Prosser, both the transsexual and transgender narratives validate the sense of cultural belonging to gendered categories. By analysing Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues* Prosser states that both the transgender and transsexual narratives promote the notion of “gendered realness,” “not the revelation of the fictionality of gender categories but the sobering realization of their ongoing foundational power” (11). The different gender identities embraced by Jess Goldberg in Feinberg’s autofiction at different points of her life, from being lesbian to one who starts hormone treatment and undergoes mastectomy to become a trans man and finally as a stone butch are all interpreted by Prosser as attempts to find a gendered home. But the “home” Feinberg’s fictional self finally reaches is one outside the binary, unlike the ones within the binary sought by early transsexuals.

For Jess Goldberg, it is the denial of the culturally stated attributes of an unambiguous gender identity that becomes her gendered home. Jess embraces an androgynous self unlike the early trans people who desperately sought membership in any one of the dichotomously gendered identities to feel at home. For Christine Jorgensen, medical transition was the only way to remove what she considered a “malformation.” Her statement that the surgery would grant her the freedom to find her “proper place in the world” resonates with her urge to fit in within the world of gender binary with a clearly distinguishable female body (Jorgensen 79). After the

completion of the first phase of her transition treatment, Jorgensen states, “Although I still had one more large medical step before total fulfillment, I had started on the new life I’d looked toward, prayed for and knew was rightfully mine. In more ways than one, I had come home at last” (Jorgensen 189). Renee Richards also expressed a similar opinion about her post-transition gender identity and states “I feel I am home” (Richards 292). The home Jorgensen and Renee mentions, as opposed to the androgynous one embraced by Jess Goldberg, is one that strictly adheres to the dictates of the gender essentialist norms. Prosser’s argument that the transgender and transsexual alike search for gendered home thus becomes further problematic. The search for a space of belonging that can be seen in *The Stone Butch Blues* is politically charged with the intention of disrupting the binary in contrast to the early transsexual narratives which became complicit in the discourse of the binary.

Though Prosser’s text attempted to reconstitute trans discourses on the centrality of body, he does acknowledge the monolithic and homogenous nature of all the early trans life narratives. Prosser’s definition of early trans life narrative as an archetypal story of transsexual emergence characterised by shared tropes of “suffering and confusion; the epiphany of self-discovery; corporeal and social transformation/ conversion; and finally, the arrival “home”- the reassignment” (101) reveals the exclusionary politics of early trans self-discourse which totally excluded other modes of trans experience from its purview and hence lacked intersectional representation.

There is an inescapable relationship between confession and power. All major institutions from religion to science used confession as a mode of regulation. In his *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, Foucault discusses how confession was effectively used in ‘Scientia Sexualis’ to control sexuality. Foucault states, “One confesses in public and in private When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some

internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat...Western man has become a confessing animal” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 59). Confessions aimed at extracting the truths about the intimate aspects of one’s life. Religion as well as science offered to take care of the well-being of the confessor. Christianity offered to protect the soul and science offered to protect the physical and mental well-being. Thus confession, says Foucault, became the most valued means of producing truth in Western civilization.

The most privileged topic of confessions was human sexuality, which the authority used as a tool to assess an individual. Such confessions were later made into a topic of scientific study and deciphered and interpreted to reveal hidden truths about the individual leading to the subjection of that identity. As stated by Foucault in an interview,

One can say certainly that psychoanalysis grew out of that formidable development and institutionalisation of confessional procedures which has been so characteristic of our civilisation. Viewed over a shorter span of time, it forms part of that medicalisation of sexuality which is another strange phenomenon of the West. (“The History” 191)

The early subjection of gender non-conforming people can well be attributed to the confessional practices carried out by medical science, especially psychiatry. Individuals experiencing gender confusion approached sexologists and then psychiatrists who demanded a full confession of their gender identity and sexual preferences. The self-narratives provided by them were used for medical categorization. These confessions were highly in demand since they satisfied the will to knowledge and through knowledge to power to safeguard heteronormativity and gender essentialism. The transgender community gradually started making use of such

confessional narratives to reach their preferred destination. Unlike the state-imposed confessions, they started producing self-revelatory narratives as part of medical procedures to get qualified for sex reassignment surgery. Trans life narratives which were once instrumental in the development of transphobic medical narratives were thus employed by people to reach their destination of an “unambiguously gendered identity.” But at the same time as stated by Julia Serano these life narratives ended up being

confessional tell-alls that non-trans people seem to constantly want to hear from transsexual women One that distorts my desire to be a female into a quest for feminine pursuits . . .one that whitewashes away all of the prejudices I face for being transsexual; a book that ends not with me becoming an outspoken trans activist or feminist, but with the consummation of my womanhood in the form of my first sexual experience with a man. (7)

According to Serano, these texts promoted an archetype of trans identity that conformed to the existing binarist gender-sex categories. These “palatable or sensationalistic transsexual storylines have resulted in making invisible the vast diversity of perspectives and experiences that exist among” trans (Serano 8).

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson list five constitutive processes of autobiographical subjectivity that help understand the complexity of life writing. They are memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency. Memory, the psychic dimension of autobiographic subjectivity, is both the source and authenticator of autobiographical acts (Smith and Watson 16). Remembering is an active process of meaningfully reconstructing the past in the present. Memory is an account of how a subject experienced an event, not the facsimile of the event. Life writing thus is a process of forming “fragments of memory into complex construction that become

stories of our lives” (Smith and Watson 16). Memories are simultaneously collective and subjective. They are historically modulated but at the same time situated in highly subjective and specific contexts. Hence memory is “never isolatable fact but situated association” (Smith and Watson 18). The act of remembering and the context of remembering are politically charged. What is remembered and what is forgotten and why, are thus integral to the cultural production of knowledge about the past. Hence the kind of memories projected in an autobiographical narration should be approached with caution and discretion. The early trans life narratives that are treated as the representative voice of the collective trans community thus demand to be read in terms of larger historical contexts and ideological issues.

The selective inclusion and exclusion of memories offered by the authors of the trans life narratives are politically oriented towards the construction of a trans identity that has a bearing upon a larger community. Sandy Stone opines that “in the transsexual's erased history we can find a story disruptive to the accepted discourses of gender, which originates from within the gender minority itself and which can make common cause with other oppositional discourses” (295). Stone says that, along with passing, the means adopted by transsexuals to live successfully in their preferred gender, they also resorted to the “effacement of the prior gender role” or the “construction of a plausible history” (295, 296) that substantiates their gender claims. Thus, Recollecting memories of the past becomes crucial for a trans person desiring medical transition. As stated by Prosser,

The autobiographical act for the transsexual begins even before the published autobiography-namely, in the clinician's office where, in order to be diagnosed as transsexual, s/he must recount a transsexual autobiography. The story of a strong, early, and persistent transgendered identification is required by the

clinical authorities, the psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychotherapists who traditionally function as the gatekeepers to the means of transsexual “conversion.” Whether s/he publishes an autobiography or not, then, every transsexual, as a transsexual, is originally an autobiographer. (101)

Hence it is essential for a transsexual to make a conscious choice of his/her memories to gain access to medical transition. This mandate to recount a transsexual autobiography puts the credibility of the recounted past in early trans life narratives in doubt. As stated by Judith Shapiro,

The problem with this approach is that one cannot take at face value transsexuals' own accounts of a fixed and unchanging (albeit sex-crossed) gender identity, given the immense pressure on them to produce the kinds of life histories that will get them what they want from the medico-psychiatric establishment. To take the problem one step further, the project of autobiographical reconstruction in which transsexuals are engaged, although more focused and motivated from the one that all of us pursue, is not entirely different in kind. We must all repress information that creates problems for culturally canonical narratives of identity and the self, and consistency in gender attribution is very much a part of this. (251)

All the early trans life narratives repeated similar memory tropes—feeling trapped in the wrong body, playing with toys culturally assigned as proper to the kids of the opposite gender, boys playing with dolls and girls playing with cars or guns, or having the urge to wear the clothes of the opposite gender. Stone’s observation about the memories of sexual gratification in trans women is worth mentioning. She says that there was not even a single preoperative trans woman who remembered having experienced erotic pleasure from their male body while living as a woman. Admitting

this will hinder their desire for transition (Stone 192). Memories, if any, relating to sexuality outside the conventional heterosexual norms, were rearticulated in ways to substantiate their transsexual claims. For instance, Renee Richards interprets two of her pre-transition sexual encounters with an English prostitute and a Parisian girl in two different ways. Renee attributes her first unsuccessful sexual encounter with the English prostitutes to her trapped female identity inside her male body (Richards 92). But the second successful sexual encounter with the Parisian girl gets interpreted as the result of the respectful, dominating and asserting approach of the Parisian girl that satisfied the girl in Renee (Richards 96). Thus, instead of acknowledging this as an expression of Renee's homosexual/bisexual orientation, the memory gets reinterpreted to suit the heteronormative norms.

Since memory relates to how one "understands the past and makes claims about their versions of the past", it becomes intersubjective. It involves the act of recollecting the past by a subject as well as for another subject (Smith and Watson 20). In the case of trans life narratives, this intersubjective nature of the memories recounted by the trans authors for themselves as well as for those who identified with them and relied on these narratives as authentic voices narrating the ways to deal with gender crisis played a vital role in establishing the medically constructed transsexual as the norm. Instead, as stated by Stone,

Transsexuals must take responsibility for all of their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of ... a traditional frame, but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body. (298)

Just like memory, experience, the temporal constitutive aspect, represented in autobiography is also a product of the cultural and historical present mediated through

one's memory and language. Experience is discursive in the sense that it is understood by a subject in the discursive context of the knowledge produced by the dominant discourse available at a time. "Experience then is the very process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject owning certain identities in the social realm, identities constituted through material, cultural, economic and interpsychic relations" (Smith and Watson 25). Thus, an autobiographical subject defines himself as belonging to a particular social status and identity based on the categories known to him or available to him at a culturally and historically specific point in time. A transgender writing autobiography during the 1950s identified himself/herself as heterosexual man or woman with the right body post-surgery because these were the identity categories deemed to be natural and normal at that point in time. They saw themselves as patients in need of medical care and surgical intervention because they interpreted their experience within the then available discursive realm of medico-psychiatric disciplines that viewed people with gender identity crisis as pathological.

According to Smith and Watson, "In autobiography acts, narrators become readers of their experiential histories, bringing discursive schema that are culturally available to them to bear on what has happened" (27). Thus, the early trans life narratives conformed to the heterosexist binary modes of gender identity available to them during the 20th century without any conscious attempt to redefine or reinterpret their experience. What further problematized this blind emulation of the gender normative structure was their attempt to manipulate and even fabricate experiences that will earn them the title of a true transsexual eligible for transition surgery. There occurred an incredibly careful repositioning of experience to fit the standard diagnostic criteria put forward by Dr. Harry Benjamin which served as clinicians' standard criteria to categorize one as transsexual. Sandy Stone opines that the

candidates' behavioural profiles matched Benjamin's because the candidates had “read Benjamin's book, which was passed from hand to hand within the transsexual community, and they were only too happy to provide the behaviour that led to acceptance for surgery” (291). They did not resort to any revisionary reading of the discourse on gender available. Instead confirmed and promoted the same in an attempt to become legitimate members of the heteronormative society. All the early authors of trans life narratives consciously interpreted all their experiences before and after surgery in terms that accorded them the status of being “real woman” or “real man”. This promoted the stereotypes of gendered embodiment from the size and curves of one’s body to the way one presents himself or herself. As stated by Stone, the narrative of their past offered by the early trans life narrators was an enactment of a “consensual definition of gender” that functioned as “the apparatus of production of gender” (291).

For instance, Renee’s life narrative presents her experience of feeling and being treated like a woman when she started taking hormones as the initial step towards transition. These descriptions are well in line with the stereotypes of femininity celebrated by heteronormativity. For instance, she says she enjoyed being complimented for her appearance (235) and since her idea of femininity was formed “prior to women’s liberation” she enjoyed the little amenities like men opening doors for her which she states, “however superficially affirmed my new role in the world” (Richards 291). Renee also describes the nature of her relationships and her perspective on people changing. She recollects how in her friendship with a doctor and his wife, her conversations switched from medicine and tennis strategies with the husband to that of the “intricacies of homemaking” and the “homely details of housewifery” with the wife (Richards 170). Renee even recounts how she started

bursting into tears for the first time in a theatre. She says, “Dick Raskind had not cried in public since he was a child” but as Renee she was “weeping uncontrollably, smack in the middle of a group of one hundred and fifty movie fans” (Richards 171).

Christine Jorgensen recollects how she had fallen into the “female role gradually, and in a natural way” after her transition. Jorgensen says, “Those people who had not known me before accepted me in the same way that I had accepted myself, and it was a period of adjustment without tension or fear” (Jorgensen 112).

All the early texts thus glorified their experience of feeling a natural inclination towards and ease with the gender performance of their opposite gender. Citing instances from the life narratives of Lili Elbe, Hedy Jo Star, Jan Morris and Christine Jorgensen, Stone states that all these narratives, “reinforce a binary, oppositional mode of gender identification” (286). Since the narrator’s experience is the primary evidence offered in a life narrative, such experiences are accepted as authentic and valid, and the narrator is the final authorial voice to interpret those experiences. Thus, the subjective experiences narrated by early trans life narrators came to be accepted as the documented history of the transgender community in general. This also curtailed the possibility of resisting the gender politics of the dominant group. Readers of life narratives harbour certain expectations regarding who should tell a particular story or who owns the authority to tell a particular life experience for them to accept it as legitimate. In this regard, the apt person to speak about transsexuality is a transsexual known publicly for his/her transsexual status. So, when Christine Jorgensen narrated her transition from a biological male to a biological female to reconstitute her body to match her gender identity, readers accepted it as the authentic and authoritative narrative on trans experience.

During the 20th century, when it was rare for a transsexual to articulate his/her

experience, the published life narratives came to be treated by society at large as the representative voice of the transgender community. The writers of these narratives expected their stories to be treated as master narratives on how to deal with cross-gender identification and the readers who identified with these narrators accepted them as sources of inspiration to transition. Though initially, these life narratives held a space of liminality outside the established canon of official autobiographies and hegemonic discourses, they enjoyed centrality within the trans community from the beginning. In the preface to her autobiography, Christine Jorgensen states that by writing her story she hoped that “a clear and honest delineation of my life may help lead to a greater understanding of boys and girls who grow up knowing they will not fit into the pattern of life that is expected of them....and the intrepid ones who, like myself, must take drastic steps to remedy what they find intolerable” (Jorgensen xvii).

For Renee Richards, her attempts to do away with Renee, her feminine self, would have met with more success if she had not discovered Lili Elbe’s life story *Man into Woman*, in a hotel stationary shop when she was seventeen. Renee says what had seemed impossible, a transition from Dick, her male identity that was assigned to her, to Renee, the female she wanted to be, was suddenly not so. “Renee had been, up to this time, only a persistent yet unattainable fantasy. She had thrust into the outskirts of reality, but that was as far as she could come. Now I could feel Renee strengthen. She had glimpsed a possible way” (Richards 55). Douglas Mason-Schrock in his 1996 study titled “Transsexuals' Narrative Construction of the True Self” states that transsexual self-narratives were more a collective creation than an individual one. It was the transgender community that invented and interpreted instances of non-conformity as evidence of transsexuality. According to Mason-Schrock,

In this community in the United States, with its over 200 local support groups and national and regional conferences, the templates for self-narratives were made and used. These narrative forms also were maintained and transmitted through community publications, computer networks, and television talk shows. The community functioned in four keyways to help individuals fashion their own self-narratives: (1) modelling, (2) guiding, (3) affirming, and (4) tactful blindness. (186)

This study exposed the conscious construction of a collective transsexual self-narrative that every trans person produced as part of his story to produce an authentic and normative account of his gender crisis. The first key to the production of a successful transsexual story was modelling wherein the transsexuals who were efficient in telling self-narratives helped newcomers of the community to understand the type of experiences to project in their narrative to get accepted as a transsexual. “If the newcomers listened closely, they could find the rhetorical tools that could be used, with some slight alterations, to signify their own differently gendered “true self” (Schrock 187). While in modelling, the newcomers copied the narratives of the established members of the community, in guiding, the second means towards a viable transsexual narrative construction, new members were guided to “Draw out stories that fit the subculture's acceptable narrative forms. This process was like the collective opening up of a person's biography to highlight life events that the group perceived as evidence of transsexuality” (Schrock 188). For instance, if a member narrating his past fails to use an acceptable narrative trope, the regular member will guide him by asking questions like “When did you first cross-dress?” (Schrock 188) since cross-dressing is one of the prominent narrative tropes of transsexual life narrative. Both these two keyways of transsexual narrative construction were realized

through the third process, i.e., affirmation. Schrock states that “After mentioning significant piece of biographical evidence, others reacted in subtle ways - usually with ‘um-hums’, nods, smiles, or sometimes sighs or ‘ahs’. These ‘murmurings’ validated the story as well as the narrator's identity” (188-89). The last and the most important key used in the construction of an intelligible transsexual self-narrative was tactful blindness by which “transsexuals sometimes affirmed self-narratives by not questioning their validity or logical coherence” (Schrock 189). Thus, they ignored the “discrepancies and implausibilities” found in others’ stories. Tactful blindness thus “allowed people with diverse biographies to see themselves as possessing similar ‘true selves’” (Schrock 189).

Bernice Hausman, by quoting references from the autobiographies of Mario Martino, Jan Morris, and Nancy Hunt about how they were influenced in their transition journey by the canonical life narratives of Christine Jorgensen and Lili Elbe states that,

while transsexual autobiographies may not be representative of the experiences of many (or even most) transsexual subjects, they are indicative of the establishment of an official discourse (or set of discourses) regulating transsexual self-representations and, therefore, modes of transsexual subjectivity. (142-143)

Hence the blind emulation of the archetypes of gender binary regarding the body, gender performance and sexuality found in these narratives had a far-reaching impact on the construction of trans subjectivity during the 20th century. Apart from realigning their bodies and adopting culture specific gender codes, these authors also promoted heterosexuality as the norm in their narratives to present themselves as natural members of the bigendered culture. These narrators make a deliberate attempt before

their transition to escape being labelled as homosexuals by curbing their natural sexual inclinations.

Christine Jorgensen narrates the experience of being interviewed by a psychiatrist for a clerical job in the army. Jorgensen says, “When the examining psychiatrist asked me, “Do you like girls?” I knew, as did every other draftee, that the question was designed to weed out the men with homosexual proclivities. Therefore, I answered simply, Yes” (Jorgensen 30). Jorgensen’s statement implies that she said “yes” not because she felt sexual attraction to women, but because she did not want to be labelled as homosexual. Later in the narrative, Jorgensen recounts her sense of shock and fear when she was openly classified as a homosexual by June, her friend. Jorgensen denied the classification and explained that even when she is attracted to men, it is “not as a man, but as a woman might” (52) thus ensuring her heterosexual orientation. Similarly, Renee Richards registers her resentment against those who considered her a homosexual when she says, “I’ve been asked many times why I didn’t simply live the life of a homosexual. This question is asked by those who do not understand that Dick (attributed male self) was a heterosexual male and that Renee (felt female self) was a heterosexual female” (Richards 57). None of them agreed to have experienced any erotic pleasure from their pre-operative body as it was stated unnatural for a true transgender by the medical discourse.

Renee, while narrating her experience of intimacy with her sister says that a particular note of this experience was that “I never got an erection As I’ve said, I never masturbated.... It may also have been the Renee side of my personality expressing hostility to my sister and her women’s body” (37). Most of them recount their past as one confounded by the questions of the nature of their sexual orientation. Initially considering themselves as homosexuals and feeling guilty because of their

attraction towards the same sex and then recognizing it as a reflection of their cross-gender identification is another common trope in all early trans life narratives. This recognition relieves them and later helps them qualify for the clinical examination for medical transition. They considered all other expressions of sexuality apart from heterosexuality as pathological, antisocial and a hindrance to their dream destination of heteronormativity.

Benjamin's subjects did not talk about any erotic sense of their own bodies....

By textual authority, physical men who lived as women and who identified themselves as transsexuals, as opposed to male transvestites for whom erotic penile sensation was permissible, could not experience penile pleasure. Into the 1980s there was not a single preoperative male-to-female transsexual for whom data was available who experienced genital sexual pleasure while living in the gender of choice. The prohibition continued postoperatively in interestingly transmuted form, and remained so absolute that no postoperative transsexual would admit to experiencing sexual pleasure through masturbation either. Full membership in the assigned gender was conferred by orgasm, real or faked, accomplished through heterosexual penetration. (Stone 291-92)

Another significant aspect of life narrative, as listed by Smith and Watson, is the notion of identity, the spatial aspect, which is discursive, historically specific, and intersectional. Identity is not an essential entity, something one is born with, inherited or natural. It is discursively constituted through social interaction in a given time. The historical time and place that constitute an identity are decisive of what is included and what is excluded in an autobiographical narrative. Thus, the exclusions found in early trans life narratives, later critiqued by scholars, are the result of the historical context in which those narratives were produced. The medical discourse on

transsexualism was about and for the white middle-class/ upper middle-class Americans who had easy access to this discourse. The presence of those who medically transitioned the neatly laid boundaries of sex-gender binary implied a potential threat to the idea of sex/gender as stable sociocultural entities. The medico-legal discourse of the century hence attempted to “delimit and contain the threatening absence of boundaries between human bodies and among bodily acts that would otherwise explode the organizational and institutional structures of social ideologies” (Epstein & Straub 2). The corrective measures offered by gender dysphoria clinics to treat the “disorder” as well as the “wrong body narrative” popularized by the early trans narratives reflect the “tension between a social and legal insistence on the absolute binaries of male and female on the one hand and the biological, cultural and psychological instabilities built into sex/gender systems on the other” (Shapiro 253). The gender identity constituted by transsexuals in their life narratives exhibits an emergent need to be conventional regarding their gender expression. This resulted in them consciously imitating, at exaggerating dimensions the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity since “transsexuals have to work at establishing their credentials as men or women in a relatively self-conscious way” (Shapiro 253).

Instead of challenging the cultural codes of gender which have been oppressive and restrictive, these authors sought to reinvent and emulate them. This gender conservatism was encouraged by medical establishments that functioned as the gatekeepers of sex reassignment surgery. Stanford Clinic, which offered sex reassignment surgeries, had undertaken an additional role of “grooming clinic” or “charm school” to help trans women learn how to “behave like a woman.” According to Stone, “Stanford recognized that gender roles could be learned (to an extent). Their involvement with the grooming clinics was an effort to produce not simply

anatomically legible females, but women.... i.e., gendered females” (291). Sandy Stone offers a critique of this tendency in “The Empire Strikes Back”. Stone quotes instances from the life narratives of early transsexuals like Lili Elbe who “trembled before her lord and master”, Jan Morris whose post-transition femininity made her feel “small, and neat” and who described “her sense of herself in relation to makeup and dress, of being on display, and is pleased when men open doors for her”, and Hedy Jo Star who wanted to brighten her face with cosmetics and desired for a strong man to protect her (Stone 286). All such accounts presented “woman” as male fetish, reinforced the culturally enforced gender roles, and promoted the “Western white male definition of performative gender” and reinforced “a binary, oppositional mode of gender identification” (Stone 285-86).

All the early male to female trans life narratives thus earnestly reflected the dictates of the medical and cultural discourse on gender- initial aversion and enduring desire to transform their genitals, their alignment with traditional ideals of femininity—portrayed as fragile, submissive, dependent on male care and protection—alongside their inability to experience erotic pleasure from their pre-operative bodies which undergo a miraculous transformation after surgery, with the newly constructed genitals enabling them to explore the conventional realms of heterosexual relationships. For instance, Renee Richards states that “When I was in the guise of Renee, I hated my genitals; my penis and testicles seemed ugly and abnormal” (Richards 56). She justifies her preference for tall young men before her surgery as “Renee’s unspoken preference” because the woman in her “felt a strange kind of security with these males” who towered over her, and she enjoyed her lack of strength in comparison to those men of her age (Richards 41). In matters of sexuality, Renee says “An unusual characteristic of my masculine side was that I could not be

aroused manually” (Richards 81) and she felt “intruded upon if anyone touched” her male genital. Her sexual preferences from the beginning, says Renee, for a “more holistic approach” instead of an intense focus on the genital, “was more like that reported by most women: a preference for a generalized sensuality” (Richards 82). After the transition surgery, Renee reports that there was one significant sexual difference between her pre-surgery male body and post-surgery female body. In place of the intense hatred of the genitals, Renee’s post-transition female self fell in love with her body. She says that her former masculine self “had been very inhibited about his body, one might even say a bit prudish. He didn’t enjoy having them touched. I conclude that this was a symptom of his ambivalence toward them. Renee, however, had no such ambivalence. She couldn’t keep her hands off herself” (287). At the same time, her life narrative documents incidents of her physical intimacy with women before her physical transition that, according to Renee, made her happy and complete.

Regarding her relationship with the woman Denise, Renee says, “The existence of Renee was considerably altered by my relationship with Denise. In the three years during which I spent so much time in Denise’s company, Renee surfaced twenty times at the most” (Richards 84). A close reading of her life narrative will expose how Renee reinterprets and repositions her sexual orientation, which most often appears to be a bisexual one in her narrative and her gender performance, to fit the dictates of the medical discourse regarding a “true transsexual.” “Many transsexuals are, in fact, “more royalist than the king” in matters of gender,” said Judith Shapiro (253). She cites a study conducted by the sociologist Thomas Kando on transsexuals to prove her point. As per the study conducted in 1968-69, transsexuals were more conservative in gender roles than cisgender men and women and surprisingly trans women tested higher in femininity than women. According to

Kando, “Unlike various liberated groups, transsexuals are reactionary, moving back toward the core culture rather than away from it. They are the Uncle Toms of the sexual revolution. With these individuals, the dialectic of social change comes full circle, and the position of greatest deviance becomes that of the greatest conformity” (Qtd in Shapiro 255). Thus, the identity propagated by early trans life narratives was predominantly a stereotypically gendered one. As stated by Stone,

All these authors replicate the stereotypical male account of the constitution of woman: dress, make-up, and delicate fainting at the sight of blood. Each of these adventurers passes directly from one pole of sexual experience to the other. If there is any intervening space in the continuum of sexuality, it is invisible. (289)

Sara Ray Rondot has further problematized the identity formation in the canon of early trans life narratives in her article “‘Bear Witness’ and ‘Build Legacies’: Twentieth and Twenty First-Century Trans Autobiography” by exposing the truth that all the canonical texts were penned by “white able-bodied straight middle-class trans woman for whom surgery and publication (are)viable options” (Rondot 531). They provided a model of a universal trans story. Aren Z Aizura, while arguing against Prosser’s notion of a gendered home attained through surgery, explains how this “normative social sphere” popularized by these canonical texts is nothing but a “fantasy...racially and culturally marked” (290). Susan Stryker, while discussing the transgender phenomenon and biopolitics, opines that an analysis of the contemporary transgender identities and related socio-political movements will expose the biopolitical racialization involved in the process of according authenticity to some trans bodies and deeming some others as abnormal. Stryker comments, “Biopower constitutes transgender as a category that it surveils, splits, and sorts in order to move

some trans bodies toward emergent possibilities for transgender normativity and citizenship while consigning others to decreased chances for life” (“Biopolitics” 41). A close observation of the trans life writing that gained popularity in America will reveal the lack of an intersectional representation in them. “There are no subjects in these discourses, only homogenized, totalized objects fractally replicating earlier histories of minority discourses in the large” (Stone 298). All the trans authors of the 20th century who gained popularity were representatives of the privileged class and race (white middle-class, upper middle-class trans women) whose accounts of their lives gained celebrity status.

The media visibility and popularity gained by the early celebrity stories, who with their race and class privilege, made passing from one gender and sex to the other look so easy and smooth. It resulted in the underrepresentation of those who lack these resources or the desire to pass. The image of transness projected by such celebrity stories did not represent the majority of trans people and thus it failed to promote intersectionality. It made it impossible for the public to imagine someone of colour or a nonbinary genderqueer as “the ideal transgender.” The trans identity mediated through the early trans life narratives was thus predominantly the product of the time in which it was produced and they negated the intersectional attribute of identity in their narratives. As stated by Smith and Watson, “There is no universal identity of “man”, or “woman” outside the specificities of historical and cultural locations” (36). A black woman speaking in her autobiography will speak at the intersectional juncture of being a black woman not as a woman or as black. (Smith and Watson 36). But the voice adopted by early trans life narratives was that of either man or woman by consciously negating their intersectional status as trans women or trans men. The absence of voices from trans people belonging to racially and

culturally marginalized sections further problematized the type of identity universalized by the canon of early trans life narratives making it exclusionary and essentialist.

Embodiment, the material dimension, is another major constituent of life narratives. Memory, experience, and identity are inextricably linked with the corporeality of the body. As stated by Smith and Watson, “the narrating body is situated at a nexus of language, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity and other specifications and autobiographical narratives mine this embodied locatedness” (Smith and Watson 38). This body can be the neurochemical body, anatomical body, imaginary body, or sociopolitical body. Which aspect of the embodiment becomes significant in an autobiography is decided by the discourse dominant at the time of the production of the narrative. The cultural codes attributed to each body will influence the kind of narrative produced about those bodies. Trans life narrators of the early phase felt a discord between their anatomic body and the “imaginary anatomy” (Smith and Watson 35), one that reflects the social and cultural norms. The gender with which they identified conflicted with the anatomy of their body as per the accepted norms of sex-gender dichotomy. The wrong body politic of early trans life narrative is a narrative trope developed in defence of this. Thus, body becomes the locus of identity in their narratives which focussed on reconstituting the wrong body as the right one to fit in within the accepted gender categories. Kate Bornstein states that “I had my genital surgery partially as a result of cultural pressure: I couldn’t be a “real woman” as long as I had a penis” (*Gender Outlaw* 119).

Smith and Watson opine that the authors of life narratives “negotiate cultural norms determining the proper use of bodies. They engage, contest, and revise cultural norms determining the relationship of bodies to specific sites, behaviours, and

destinies. They reproduce, mix, or interrogate cultural discourses defining and distinguishing the normative and the ab-normative body” (42). An analysis of the early trans life narratives reveals the absence of a similar critical engagement or negotiation with the cultural norms connected to gender embodiment. Instead, they complied with the heteronormative society’s biological essentialism. This medical model of transsexuality was invented and perpetuated by male doctors and they offered surgery as a solution accessible only to the upper-class white trans. The insistence on surgery to get accepted as a normal human being exerted excessive pressure on those who could not access medical transition. As said earlier, this mandate on the socially acceptable gender embodiment led to exclusionary practices since “the fulfilment of the surgical dream is subject to cultural and class constraints” (Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw* 119). But at the same time de medicalization of transsexuality was also not an easy option for a trans person of lower strata. In the opinion of Bornstein,

Transsexuals, especially middle-class pre-operative transsexuals, are heavily invested in maintaining their status as “diseased” people. The de medicalization of transsexuality would further limit surgery in this culture, as it would remove the label of “illness” and so prohibit insurance companies from footing the bill. (*Gender Outlaw* 119)

The homogenized medical model of transsexuality prescribed by DSM and SoC of Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA) and propagated through the monolithic narratives of trans autobiographers of the 20th century, should be understood and analysed within the context of the increased concern and control over human bodies that characterized 19th and 20th century. Foucault in his *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, explains how medicine came to

play the most crucial role in establishing the norm dictating what qualifies as normal and what gets deemed as abnormal. A whole category of people was labelled as deviants as per the standards of the medical norms (Foucault, *Sexuality* 43). This increasing affinity towards the medicalization of the human body and desire led to the emergence of a medical model that functioned as an agent of disciplinary power. It led to an increase in state control and surveillance over the individual and subordinated the questions of subjectivity to that of sex.

Medical science's attempts to reconstitute human bodies within the conventional frame of heteronormativity through gender confirmation/ reassignment surgeries could have been used by transsexuals to reconstruct the norm and challenge the stability of those normalizing principles. In this regard, it would have become a reverse discourse. But instead, early trans life narrators attempted to "occupy a place as speaking subjects within the traditional gender frame thus becoming complicit in the discourse which one wishes to deconstruct" (Stone 295). Thus, the act of transitioning from one anatomical sex to the other without problematizing this choice becomes one in which "the transsexual and the medicolegal/Psychological establishment are complicit" and it "forecloses the possibility of a life grounded in the intertextual possibilities of the transsexual body" (Stone 297).

Earlier trans life narratives portrayed sex reassignment surgery as the most important means to secure one's claim to a particular gender identity. For Christine Jorgensen, her journey to Denmark in search of an answer from the medical establishment for her gender dysphoria was like "a one-way ticket to a new life" (Jorgensen 86). The hormones she took immediately made her happy with the "knowledge that (she) is walking towards a recognizable goal. That (she) wasn't standing still anymore" (Jorgensen 78). The day she started her hormone treatment

without a doctor's advice is remembered by her as "the beginning of a life of freedom" (Jorgensen 78). Surgery for her becomes the magic remedy that could complete the process of her move from gender dysphoria to gender affirmation, something that would "remove what I considered a malformation and, in turn, gives me the freedom I wanted, freedom to find my proper place in the world" (Jorgensen 79). But placing the body at the centre and by making claims to have undergone drastic physical and psychological changes after body transformation relegated self-identity claims to the background. All the earlier trans life narratives followed the same design of documenting the struggles with the wrong body during the pre-operative phase and everything falling miraculously in line immediately after hormone treatment or genital reconstruction surgery. Here body becomes the prerogative on which her gender identity rests and manifests.

The elevation of physicality above an individual's innate sense of identity rendered all such narratives inherently problematic. Many critics like Jay Prosser have argued body transformation as providing materiality to the trans experience, as the "very route to identity and bodily integrity" (Prosser 6). According to Talia Mae Bettcher, "It is far from clear that a transsexual woman is "really female or a woman prior to genital reconstruction surgery." She concludes that "a transsexual woman prior to genital reconstruction surgery would most likely be viewed as really a man, at least in many mainstream contexts" (Bettcher 386). However, what rendered all these narratives problematic was the way earlier trans life accounts sought to conceal their pre-operative history and glamorize their post-operative identity as the real and ultimate truth. Instead of placing body/ sex before one's notion of self, one should consider his or her innate sense of being part of a particular gender as definitive in terms of deciding membership in a particular sex category. This "centrality of self-

identity” (Bettcher 387) prompts a person to subject oneself to sex reassignment process to literalize that identity. Beyond the binary model negates this desire for materializing one’s sense of gender identity while promoting gender fluidity as a mode of resisting binary. Both approaches were biased either against or in the direction of the gender-sex binary. The wrong body model that promoted passing post-transition and beyond the binary model that resisted transition were restrictive in the sense that they either portrayed the trans people as essentialist by insisting on transition or by forcing trans individuals who desired concreteness of their gender identity to inhabit an in-between space.

Jorgensen’s memoir reveals how the trans life narratives worked hand in hand to proliferate the medical model of transsexualism as the “real” and the only valid and legitimate model of transsexualism. In her preface to the memoir, Jorgensen cites three “unrelated incidents” as decisive of her life post-surgery. According to her

The most significant of these incidents consisted of a few words in a letter written to me in April 1965 by Dr. Harry Benjamin, the distinguished medical scientist. “Indeed Christine,” he wrote, “without you probably none of this would have happened; the grant, my publications, lectures etc... You will find me giving you credit in my book. (Jorgensen (XIV)

The book mentioned here by Jorgensen, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* published in 1966, can be considered the foundational text of the medical model of transsexualism and sex conversion. Benjamin acknowledging Jorgensen’s surgery as contributing much to popularizing and legitimizing this model and Jorgensen’s opinion that it was she who was “more prominently in his debt than he is in mine” (XIV) is evocative of how the medical world explained transsexualism in pathological terms and how the transsexual writers of the 20th century found this wrong body

model as the perfect framework to explain and rationalize their experience. According to Rondot, this “framework offered a generation of trans authors the vocabulary and understanding to cognize their experience albeit through a limiting model” (6). Joanne Meyerowitz opines that the sex reassignment surgery and the following media frenzy over the same “opened debate on the visibility and mutability of sex” in the USA (*How Sex Changed* 1). This narrative of “boundary transgression” (Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* 2) challenged American doctors and scientists to reconsider the notions of gender and sex. It led to a serious reconceptualization of sex in the mid-20th century with biological sex redefined as mutable and not the determinant of one’s gender identity. But in much of the popular culture, sex still dictates particular forms of gender, which in turn dictates particular forms of sexuality. In this default logic, a female is a “naturally and normally feminine person who desires men, and a male is naturally and normally a masculine person who desires women. All other permutations of sex, gender and sexuality still appear if they appear at all as pathologically anomalous or socially strange” (Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* 4).

The mutability of biological sex, which was supposed to rupture the hegemonic discourse of biologism and heteronormativism becomes essentialist in early trans life narratives. These texts professed the belief that one needs to transform morphology through hormones and surgery to rightly align one’s body with one’s gender identity. The corporeality of a rightly sexed body became the ultimate destination and a prerequisite for trans people to gain visibility and acceptability in the cisgender world. The early trans life writings thus ended up being body narratives feeding the very oppression it attempts to resist. As stated by Meyerowitz, trans writers “articulated their sense of self with the language and cultural forms available to them” (*How Sex Changed*, 13). When early trans autobiographers claimed their

gender identity getting confirmed and accepted through medical transition, they were giving experiential evidence to substantiate biological essentialism. Ann Bolin while discussing the male-to-female transsexuals of Berdache society in “Transcending and Transgendering: Male-to Female Transsexuals, Dichotomy and Diversity” states that the approach of attributing centrality to medical transition suggested that “transsexuals did not begin their transition with fully crystalized feminine personal identities, as is widely reported in the medical literature, but rather gradually acquired a feminine identity” through the process of transition (“Transcending” 449). The term gender reassignment surgery or gender affirmation surgery used to refer to physical transition further places gender as re-assignable with a change of genital.

Based on an intensive participant observation of male-to-female Berdache, Bolin had come up with various phases of their transformation. Bolin calls it “Schematic representation of Becoming” (“Transcending” 450). According to this the process of ‘becoming’ occurs within an individual as well as outside. The four modes of transformation identified by Bolin are “personal identity transformation” which happens from within a trans-identified individual, “social identity transformation”, “phenotypic transformation” and “rite of transformation” which complements the personal identity transformation of an individual from outside (Bolin, “Transcending” 450). Personal identity transformation begins with gender identity confusion which gradually develops into transsexual identity becoming the primary identity and the gender assigned at birth becoming sub identity. This phase coincides with dual role occupancy and passing in public and the process of physical transformation through hormonal reassignment in Phenotypic transformation.

During the third stage, the person accepts the gender identity of his/her preference as the primary one and the transsexual identity of the second stage

becomes a sub identity. As part of social identity transformation, the person anticipates full-time status as the other gender and learns the measures for full-time passing. The attainment of this stage is facilitated by the Phenotypic transformation made possible through hormone reassignment and a longing for surgical construction of the genitalia of the preferred gender. In the last phase, the person fully identifies as a woman/ man and rejects the transsexual identity and passes as a natural and unselfconscious man or woman (Bolin 450). According to Bolin's "Scheme of Becoming", the physical transformation coincides with the rejection of transsexual identity. The surgical construction of an appropriate genital becomes the point of essentialist assimilation of the person into the hegemonic heteronormative realm of existence. The process of physical transition in effect becomes a rejection of transsexual identity and in this regard, it promotes the gender sex binary.

To add to this there is a hierarchical prioritization of transsexuals over trans who refuse to undergo sex change surgery, for instance, transvestites or cross-dressers. Those who identify themselves with the gender opposite to the one assigned to them at birth but do not succumb to surgical transformation were eliminated as mere impersonators in the Berdache community. Bolin says, "Transsexuals viewed themselves as the only authentic participants in the inside-outside dilemma, perceiving gay female impersonators as engaging in parody and play" ("Transcending" 451). While this urge for physical transformation to align one's body with one's preferred gender identity is a natural one, what problematizes the wrong body trope of early trans life narratives is the hegemonic status attributed to this somatic transformation and the sexed embodiment. Trans life narratives of the 20th century with their prioritization of the body as the signifier of their gender identity professed a similar kind of ideology.

Even those who underwent transition but did not attain the physical attributes of an “ideal woman/man” were detested and subjugated. Renee Richards’ use of the phrase “half-baked creatures” to refer to the male-to-female transsexuals who did not fit in within the ideals of femininity unveils this biased attitude. She describes them as “plans that had gone astray.... bad plans to begin with” (164). On the other hand, Renee describes herself as a “genuine transsexual” (272) with the necessary “somatic compliance” for transition as commented by Dr. Benjamin so that she can be “made into a socially acceptable woman” (Richards 165). This insistence on a socially acceptable body as a prerequisite to get accepted as a “true transsexual” was a product of the medical science that relied heavily on biological essentialism in gender attribution. Renee’s prejudice against those trans people who failed to satisfy the norms of medical science becomes further evident in the way she describes Johnnie Taylor, a trans woman whom she had met as part of her group therapy. Renee states that she was not a “true transsexual but a paranoid schizophrenic attempting to escape into the world of womanhood” (Richards 168). The reasons given by Renee to deny Johnnie the status of true transsexual were that she was a husband and had children. Renee says, “Unfortunately, she made a poor one: her teeth were bad, and her skin was heavily pitted. Worse than those factors was Johnnie’s generally unfeminine effect. Her gestures, walk, carriage, and voice were all masculine.” Since she failed to satisfy the requirements needed to be deemed as a woman or a “true transsexual”, Johnnie becomes “nothing, neither a man nor a woman” for Renee and hence she committed suicide (Richards 168).

20th century trans life narratives expressed a similar sense of detest against cross-dressers who did not undergo medical transition. Christine Jorgenson expresses her sense of shock and intolerance when she was described as a “female

impersonator” who “doted on wearing feminine clothing” in her private life. She describes transvestite as a “narrow category” and expresses the felt need to rectify the misunderstanding the public had about her (157). She makes it quite clear that she was not a transvestite but a transsexual since a transvestite was considered inferior and fake when compared to a transsexual. In support of her superiority as a true transsexual over transvestite, Jorgensen states,

I had never worn or wanted to wear feminine clothing while I retained any evidence of masculinity. Although I was entitled in the eyes of the medical experts, I didn't wear female clothing until my legal status as a woman was established on my passport, approved by the United States Department. I merely wanted to correct a misjudgment of Nature, so that I might physically and legally become the person I felt I was intended to be. (162)

Thus, in the gender scheme of 20th-century trans life narratives, one can either be a woman or a man or nothing. Those who are in between have no right to live. All these narratives treat the corporeality of the body as the container of one's gender identity. Thus, they miserably failed to propose a counter-narrative capable of questioning the essentialist gender norms. After the physical transformation, they attempted passing and completely negated their transsexual identity. This normalizing tendency of canonical trans life narratives was criticized as essentialist which the life narratives of the 21st century attempt to revise. Bolin states that “male-to-female transsexuals defined themselves by a bottom-line criterion of desire for hormonal reassignment and surgery, privileging their status within the Berdache society. If one was not absolutely committed to having the surgery, then one was defacto a transvestite” (“Transcending” 452). Those who had the urge to cross-dress but were not ready for surgical transformation were not “really women/men.” The notion of

ascribing authenticity or “realness” solely to the post-surgery state, while disregarding the pre-surgery experience, adds complexity to the assertion made by trans-identified individuals that they pursued surgery due to a genuine inner identification with the other gender. Canonical texts portray surgery as a miracle that attributes realness to their gender identity. “If one were transsexual, their pursuit of hormones and surgery accompanied one’s transition. The desire for bodily reassignment became a mark of authenticity to male-to-female (as well as for female-to-male) transsexuals” (Bolin “Transcending” 452).

The medical transition of the body becomes the “specific narrative moment in early trans life narratives, “the moment of neocolporraphy ... that is, of gender reassignment or “sex change surgery (Stone 286). Stone explodes the myth of their magical moment of transition by comparing her experience to that of the account provided by Jan Morris in her memoir. For Morris, Surgery becomes the moment when she “bid goodbye to her male self seen in the mirror to wake up post-surgery as a ‘real woman. But for Stone, the experience is different. She says,

I was reminded of this account on the eve of my own surgery. Gee, I thought, on that occasion, it would be interesting to magically become another person in that binary and final way. So, I tried it myself...going to the mirror and saying goodbye to the person I saw there...and unfortunately, it didn’t work.

A few days later, when I could next get to the mirror, the person looking back at me was still me. I still don’t understand what I did wrong. (301)

Jan Morris saw her “other self” (qtd. in Stone 286) emerging after she changed her genitalia through surgery which Stone failed to see. For Stone, “sex and gender are quite separate entities, but transsexuals commonly blur the distinction by confusing the performative character of gender with the physical “fact” of sex, referring to their

perceptions of their situations as being in the “wrong body” (Stone 282). The “Exit James Morris, enter Jan Morris” moment of the canonical narrative, through the aid of 20th century advanced medical procedures, gets bluntly exposed by Stone by juxtaposing her experience with that of others documented in their “almost religious narrative of transformation” (Stone 281). Sandy Stone also challenges the pertinence of the studies done in an attempt to define transsexualism as a disorder. She critiques the limited sampling that miserably failed to be sufficiently representative as well as the questionable methods adopted for study based on which the medico-legal and psychological discourses established transsexualism as a disorder (Stone 283).

To authenticate their claims to their preferred gender, apart from physical intersexuality, the early writers had resorted to a highly skilled manipulation of culturally accepted and stereotypical gender codes. Hausman quotes excerpts from Roberta Cowell’s autobiography *Roberta Cowell’s Story* (1954) in which she describes her physique as one with “wide hips and narrow shoulders”, the stereotype of the feminine body to provide a physiological base for her femininity. In the subsequent pages of her narrative, she brilliantly links this to her gender expression to prove that she has become a woman. There she describes herself using the stereotypes of femininity like heightened intuition, slower mental process, the super feminine quality to blush, a likeness for stories and novels and a milder and less aggressive nature (Cowell 35-50). Sandy Stone has cited several instances of similar attitude from Christine Jorgenson, Hedy Jo Star, Jan Morris, and Lili Elbe in her essay “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto”. The desire to medically transition from one sex to the other resulted in the construction of a plausible history that reiterated stereotypical norms of masculinity and femininity. After the transition, transsexuals were further forced to maintain the same to pass as “normal” man

/woman in a social structure that glorified gender dichotomy.

Heather Brunskell Evans' observation about the transition and subsequent media projection of Caitlyn Jenner in 2015 made in her text *The Transgender Body Politics* published in 2020 echoes the same opinion and exposes the extent to which trans people are subjected to gender conservatism even in 21st century. She describes the photo of Caitlyn Jenner on the cover page of *Vanity Fair* magazine published in 2015 when Jenner came out as a trans woman as bearing "... all the hallmarks of the sexualised performance of femininity: a state of semi-undress in a satin corset; long, tumbling hair; exposed 'look-at-me' breasts in a push-up bra; and a cinched waist to give an hour-glass figure" (qtd. in Evans 3). Though Evans's book reminds one of the anti-trans ideologies of earlier feminists like Janice Raymond, the above remark sheds light on the highly conservative simulation of the conventional codes of femininity or masculinity by some trans people even in the 21st century. Trans thus promoted doing gender in ways more obvious than how it is usually done by cisgendered people.

Earlier trans life narratives gave more currency to the stereotypes of the gender binary and became accomplices in promoting the cultural codes of gender dichotomy.

Hausman's observation in this regard is worth mentioning. She says:

The production of the concept of gender within research on intersexuality and transsexualism suggests however, that the transsexual speaks fully within the cultural discourse of /on gender, not only because that discourse was produced precisely to account for intersexual and transsexual subject's experience, but also because the performance of transsexual subjectivity depends upon the expert manipulation of traditional gender codes. To be a transsexual is perhaps to be "in gender" more fixedly than other subjects whose gender performance are perceived to be "natural." (144)

Contrary to the widespread belief on trans narratives as counter-hegemonic, these earlier texts were well in line with the hegemonic discourse on gender. They tend to exhibit stereotypical gender cues in public to gain their preferred gender attribution and thereby social sanction for their gender identity. Passing and medical transition, two remedies proposed to normalize gender variant people, reproduced the natural attitude to gender by imparting a sense of facticity to gender. So, the trans who is an obvious exception, becomes a viable example to prove that there can only be two genders corresponding to two sexes. According to Kessler and McKenna,

Transsexuals take their own gender for granted, but they cannot assume that others will. Consequently, transsexuals must manage themselves as male or female so that others will attribute the “correct” gender. It is easier for us to see that transsexuals “do” (accomplish) gender than it is to see this process in nontranssexuals. The transsexuals' construction of gender is self-conscious. They make obvious what nontranssexuals do “naturally” they share with all the other members of the culture the natural attitude toward gender. (11)

Gender-appropriate physical and behavioural presentation of oneself was a mandate put forward by the medical industry to grant one access to the surgical transition of sex. For an assigned female to be declared male, she will have to perform all aspects of masculinity to a “stereotypical extent” (Kessler& McKenna 118). Most of the gender clinics wanted the patient to live in their preferred gender for at least six months before their surgery. This was done to assess the degree to which one is comfortable and compatible to live as the opposite gender and how convincingly they present themselves before others in their new gender. All this contributed to gender stereotyping in trans identity discourses.

According to Kessler and McKenna, the transsexuals' reluctance to respond to

certain questions asked to them pertaining to the way they see their gender as part of their study is an instance of their eagerness to safeguard the natural attitude to gender so as to belong to any one of the two genders. The interviewed transsexuals were “unable” to answer questions like “What did you have to learn in order to be successfully taken as a man/woman?” or “Did you ever make mistakes which caused people to doubt you?” (124). Kessler & Mckenna conclude that “To ask a ‘real’ female if she ever made mistakes is rather senseless since her gender cannot be doubted. The transsexuals’ inability to answer these questions was a way of producing a sense of the naturalness of their gender” (124). They wanted to establish the notion that their preferred gender is natural and invariable, rather, they were born with it. At the same time there existed “grooming clinics” or “charm schools” to teach those who seek medical transition the proper way to be a man or a woman. According to Sandy Stone, “grooming clinic was an effort to produce not simply anatomically legible females, but woman.... i.e., the gendered females” (291). Those who medically transitioned under the surveillance of grooming experts were thus taught gender roles with the intent to produce stereotypically gendered beings. The early trans narratives’ portrayal of gender attributes and gender roles confirm this cultural construction and resuscitation of the gender binary. All the early trans authors thus exhibit an increased inclination towards the assimilation of gender schema, the conventional, prototypical, and prescriptive standards that guide an individual’s perception of gender (Bem 1981). The authors of these narratives, though brave enough to openly declare their transsexual status in public, were never ideologically motivated to politicize and critique the gender binary. Instead, they were deeply rooted in the gender dichotomous social structure and hence failed to propagate a revisionist agenda to undo the stereotypes of gender roles.

Closely connected to the discursive nature of memory, experience, identity, and embodiment is the notion of agency, the transformative attribute that a narrator is believed to possess in documenting the story of his life. According to Smith and Watson, “autobiographical narratives as proofs of human agency” is a myth because people document their life through the “cultural script available to them and they are governed by cultural strictures about self-representation in public” (Smith and Watson 42). This is true of early trans life narratives. The authors succumb their agency and free will to blindly reiterate the norms of masculinity and femininity so as to enter the space of heteronormativity as legitimate members. The conscious exclusions and manipulations of truth found in early trans life narratives substantiate the argument that these writers were the agents not of their free will but of the hegemonic discourse of gender binary. Thus, in early trans life narratives, the psychic, the temporal, the spatial, the material and the transformative dimensions were decided by the cultural code of heterosexual binarist gender codes.

Sandy Stone and Bernice Hausman agree about the lack of agency evident in early texts. In the opinion of Hausman “transsexual autobiographies serve to encourage and enable transsexual subjects to conform to the parameters of an established “transsexual personal history” to obtain the desired medical treatment” (143). It is therefore essential to differentiate between the self that narrates and the self that is being narrated in a trans life narrative to better understand the politics of trans identity formation in life writings. Smith and Watson state that there is a distinction between the autobiographical self that is being narrated, “the “I”-then” and the autobiographical self that is narrating, “the “I”-now” (58). Prosser refers to this as “ “I” of the bios and the “I” of the graph, the past self written and the present self writing” (102). According to Prosser, there is a split between these two selves which

is heightened by the fact of sex change surgery in trans autobiographies. Through the process of recounting the past, through the autobiographical narrative, this split between the subject of enunciation and the subject enunciating gets rejoined into a single whole (Prosser 102). But Hausman finds a temporal discontinuity between the stories of these two selves, the self that claims to have become “real woman” or “real man” after sex change surgery and the self before sex change with its claim of “already being the other sex” (Hausman 173) in trans life narratives.

In real life, outside the narrative space of autobiography, this split gets heightened through the trans’ insistence on passing. According to Smith and Watson, the differentiation between the narrating “I” and the narrated “I” assumes that “the “I”-now inhabits a stable present in reading the “I”-then. It also assumes a normative notion of life narrative as a retrospective narrative about a separable and isolatable past that is fully past” (Smith and Watson 58). This assumption, says Smith and Watson, regarding a stable “I” narrating an “isolatable “I” of the past does not hold relevance considering the complexities of the autobiographical subjectivities revealed in a life narrative. Early trans life narratives presented the narrating self as a stable subject inhabiting the present with clearly distinguishable sex and gender attributes qualifying them as ideal members of the heterosexual society. The narrated self in these texts is an unstable one who inhabits a distant and isolatable past with no bearings on the present self that narrates the story.

Christine Jorgensen describes her medical transition as a means to her rightful destiny. Referring to her transition, Jorgensen says, “In essence, it was a search for dignity and the right to live life in freedom and happiness” (307). She describes her post-transition self as “calmer, more accepting and certainly happier” (308). Jorgensen identifies her pre-transition past as one characterized by “acute feelings of

loneliness” where she “felt like an outsider” (20). She defines the narrated self of her life narrative as “one who deviated, emotionally from what had been termed normal” (28). After her transition, Jorgensen states that her pre-transition years “of loneliness, terror and fear were slipping away into a distant past” (171). The divide between the narrated self and the narrating self becomes increasingly pronounced in the second half of Jorgensen's life story wherein she narrates her life as a woman post-transition. During this phase, she focuses solely on her life as a nightclub performer, delving into the challenges and trials she faced throughout her career. The narrative distinctly segregates her previous experiences of grappling with gender dysphoria before her transition, and the subsequent phase marked by contentment and tranquility after the medical transition.

Renee Richards’ narrative also offers a similar account. For Renee, her pre-transition self was one psychologically torn between two identities of different gender, the masculine Dick, and the feminine Renee. Her statement “As Dick, I had been reclusive and hard to reach. As Renee, I started to frequent parties for the first time in years” (290), vividly captures the significant transformation she claims to have experienced with regard to her gender identity. Through the juxtaposition of her narrated masculine self and her narrating feminine self Renee vividly articulates the expected shift from an unstable past to a stable present achieved through medical transition. According to Renee, her medical transition from male to female miraculously transported her from the “futile years of Psychotherapy, the driving compulsion, the skulking around” to a profound sense of belonging, where she proudly proclaims, “I feel like home” (Richards 164, 292). These early narratives thus promoted a deliberate distancing of the old self. These texts exhibit a sense of discontinuity between the past and the present subjectivities which complicated the

kind of trans subjectivity portrayed in these narratives. The deliberate negation of the former self in favour of “passing” to establish the present self as normal and real questions the authenticity of the subjective history narrated in early trans life narratives.

Julia Serano further problematizes the medical discourse’s insistence on “passing” by exposing the heterosexist agenda harboured by the gatekeepers of transsexualism to protect the interest of the cissexist society. She says that these gatekeepers eventually knew that many trans people repeated what the medical practitioners wanted to hear, not what they actually experienced. Hence in the medical literature on transsexuality, transsexuals were described as “deceptive” and “liars” (Serano 91). Sandy Stone states that according to the Stanford Gender Dysphoria program, medical clinics do not collect transsexual autobiographies “because they consider autobiographical accounts thoroughly unreliable” (285). This points to the hypocrisy of these gatekeepers who accused transsexuals of being liars when their own discourse directed transsexuals to lie about their past post-transition. According to Serano, “While this requirement (to pass) was purportedly put into place to protect the transsexual from the cissexual public, it is clear that what concerned the gatekeepers the most was protecting the cissexual public from the transsexual” (91).

According to Smith and Watson, there can be four subjectivities evident in life narratives. The “real” or historical “I” is the person located in a particular time and place who produces the autobiographical “I.” The existence of this person is verifiable through various kinds of historical records. The narrating “I” is the person who is available to the readers as the narrator of the autobiography. Unlike the historical “I” who possesses a broad experiential history extending a life time, the narrating “I” relate himself to the experiential history of the narrated story he is telling. The

narrated “I” is the object of narration, the central subjectivity of the narrative that the narrative “I” depicts through the memories. The ideological “I” is the identity that is culturally available to the narrator at the time of narration. The ideological self provides culturally acceptable ways to understand the self. At any historical moment, there will be multiple identities available to the narrator. Ideological “I” is the possible position for the autobiographer to occupy, contest or revise. At times, the narrator “I” may manipulate aspects of his narrative to support a prevailing ideology (Smith and Watson 59-63).

Early trans life writings exhibited a tendency on the part of the narrating “I” to omit or manipulate aspects of the narrated “I” to project the real or historical “I” as an ideological identity that the current norms of the hegemonic cissexist culture offer him regarding his gender identity. According to Francois Lionnet, “self-writing is a strategic move that opens up a space of possibility when the subject of history (narrated “I”) and the agent of discourse (narrating “I”) can engage in dialogue with each other (and) new modes of interaction between the personal and the political are created” (193). Early trans life narratives foreclosed the possibility of such a dialogue through the self-perpetuated gaps and omissions in their narrative while attempting to conform to the norms of heteronormativity. According to Stone, “For a transsexual, as a transsexual, to generate a true, effective and representational counter discourse is to speak from outside the boundaries of gender, beyond the constructed oppositional nodes which have been predefined as the only positions from which discourse is possible” (295). Transgender politics that emerged during the 1990s can be considered as an attempt to erect a counter discourse to explode the cultural imperative on the binary.

Transgender politics, like any other minority identity politics, wanted to

generate new theoretical perspectives to look at and resist the dominant discourses on gender identity and thus envisage new possibilities for understanding trans identity. This could only be made possible by reversing the existing power structures of the dominant discourse. Discourse in its basic sense refers to any form of written or spoken communication used by a cultural group in a particular context. The word discourse originates from the Latin word *discursus*, which means running to and fro. Discourse is a way of transferring information. The notion of discourse was brought into focus as a source of different domains of knowledge and power by Foucault. Chris Weedon in her text *Feminist Practice and Post Structuralist Theory* defines Foucauldian discourse as

ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. (108)

Discourse is a way of structuring and controlling knowledge which in turn is integral to the exercise of power in various disciplines. According to Foucault, power emanates from knowledge of truth and is related to discourse. Discourse is everywhere; it permeates through all social structures. In his lecture, "The Order of Discourse" delivered in 1970, Foucault identifies the mechanisms by which discourses are constructed and propagated within social structures. He says that in every society,

the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected and organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its

ponderous, formidable materiality. (“Order of Discourse” 52)

Since “discourse is the power which is to be seized” (Foucault, “Order of Discourse” 53), the very act of people speaking and their discourses getting proliferated has been considered perilous. There were always attempts to construct and sustain certain discourses as dominant through silencing and marginalizing alternate discourses. Foucault identifies the external exclusionary mechanisms of prohibition, division and rejection and will to truth, as well as the internal mechanisms of commentary, author, and discipline that are used by dominant discourse to silence and delimit alternate discourses (Foucault, “Order of Discourse” 52-58). Dominant discourse refers to certain patterns of writing, speaking, or behaving that are understood and shared within a community by a majority. They are always normative and exclude the discourses of the minority others with no access to power. Foucault also introduced the idea of a discursive field within which is located the institutions and practices that give birth to social structures. Chris Weedon, in this regard, mentions how this discursive field offers different modes of discourses related to meaning and subjectivity to the individual which varies with regard to the degree of power and importance it holds. The most powerful becomes the dominant discourse and the rest are excluded or silenced as marginal discourses. According to Weedon such discourses which are dismissed by the hegemonic one “will give rise to challenges to existing practices from within or will contest the very basis of the current organization and the selective interest which it represents” (*Feminist Practice* 35). This is what Foucault referred to as reverse discourses in *The History of Sexuality* Volume 1. While a dominant discourse prescribes certain modes of subjectivity as the norm, the nature of power constituted by this discourse signals the emergence of other subject positions through a reversal. Foucault cites the example of homosexuality as a

reversal of dominant heterosexual discourse.

Power as conceived by Foucault is always in a state of flux. He says power is omnipresent and discursive. In *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 Foucault rejected the juridico-discursive model of power as an essential move towards analysing “power within the concrete and historical framework of its operation.” The relationship between power and discourses is not just one of power and powerlessness. Foucault says, “Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it...discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy “(*Sexuality* 100-101). Thus, power stands for “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 92).

Foucault thus replaces the idea that power is restricted in the hands of a few privileged ones who represent the dominant discourse. Instead, power becomes omnipresent; it emanates from all and exists everywhere. Power is not a possession of someone, but it is inherent in all social structures and is exercised by all at some point in their relationship with these social structures. Since power emanates from everywhere, not just from top to bottom, resistance is integral to the concept of power. Every form of power entails the source of resistance within. This means every dominant discourse and the power structure linked to that discourse carries within it the seeds of reverse discourses.

Transgender identity politics thus can be regarded as an alternate discourse on gender and sexuality which the heteronormative norm attempts to delimit through

exclusion. It posed challenge to the stability of the power structure of dominant sexuality through its discourses in various forms. The hegemonic discourse on gender has been one major apparatus of power that controlled almost all social structures. Bornstein states that “power seems basic to gender and gets played through gender, usually without the permission or even the understanding of the people involved in the playing” (*Gender Outlaw* 121). But the emergence of trans with their ability to move freely into and out of the existing hegemonic gender categories unsettled the foundations of this power structure. As explained before, the notion of autonomy in life narrative is a myth. The narrating self is reflecting upon the narrated self within the context of a given social, cultural, and historical milieu. The modes of self-representation found in life narratives are not self-identical. It is not a direct translation of one’s experience, but rather an act of retrospection where the experiences of the past are analysed and understood within the available cultural codes. Hence the making of the self in autobiography is politically charged. It can reproduce existing subjectivities or unmake the existing ones in favour of a subversive politics.

Life narratives become a critique of the domains of power when it subverts the norm of the existing system. Early trans life narratives reiterated the normative notions of gender as the prevailing cultural and social circumstances compelled them to conform to those norms. It was the only and the best means available to integrate oneself into the mainstream of social structure. Their feelings and expressions that are contrary to the culture that regarded sex and gender as identical were either silenced or appropriated to match the heterosexist society’s expectations. Thus, they produced transnormativity, a set of norms that established transgender as one trapped in the wrong body with the right gendered behavioural patterns struggling to escape that

body with the aid of medical science. These texts invoked gender normative narrative tropes and gave currency to the stereotypical and binarist gender codes and sexualities in their narrative.

The 1990s witnessed a revolutionary uprising of the trans community who set out to subvert the culture's insistence on dichotomous gender roles and identities. Sandy Stone's essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" is considered as the official beginning of this upsurge. The essay made a brilliant attempt to expose how the early trans life narratives simulated the conventional heterosexist norms relating to body, gender, and sexuality, the biological, social, and psychological attributes of gendered identity. Stone inaugurated the new transgender politics which provided a social and cultural ground conducive to the production of counterhegemonic life narratives of the 21st century. Trans life narratives' potential to embed a radical critique of gender normativity, the assumption that certain gender match only certain bodies was thwarted by the 21st century narratives by their rejection of the post-transition claims of having reached the right body found in early narratives. Other two major publications that influenced the emergence of this new trans consciousness were Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw*. Feinberg boldly rejected the perfectly sexed body as the abode of gender and proudly paraded an ambivalent gender-sex identity and Bornstein admits the cultural pressure that forced her to transition contradicting the early transsexual's claim of a natural hatred of their body and longing for transition. She says that "I had my genital surgery partially as a result of cultural pressure: I couldn't be a "real woman" as long as I had a penis" (*Gender Outlaw* 119). Bornstein's brand of trans activism promoted inclusion rather than the exclusionary ideology of early trans narratives. She argued against the categorization of trans people into pre-operative transsexuals and post-

operative transsexuals that left behind those who stood outside the medically constructed discourse on transsexuality and demanded the inclusion of the option of “non-operative transsexual—someone who doesn't opt for genital surgery” (*Gender Outlaw* 121).

As stated by Weedon in the context of feminist discourse, reverse discourse is one that “enables a subjected subject to speak in her own right” and the first step of this reversal is “the production of new resistant discourses” that would “successfully challenge and subvert the whole range of practices and subjectivity guaranteed by” the hegemonic discourse (*Feminist Practice* 109-110). Sandy Stone identifies this as the posttranssexual politics that she wanted the transgender community to practice in their counter-hegemonic production of life writings. Kate Bornstein defines the posttranssexual trans as

A new generation of transsexuals who are assessing their journey not as either/or, but rather as an integration, a whole. In bypassing the either/or construct of what has up to now been transsexualism, these new transsexuals are slipping out from under the control of the culture. And a new subculture is being born. (*Gender Outlaw* 121)

The 21st century authors and life narratives chosen for this study can well be defined as members of this new subculture who deny the hegemonic hold of the conventional gender identity. These writers challenge the notion of culturally intelligible genders within the heteronormative frame. According to Judith Butler, “intelligible” genders are those that “institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (*Gender Trouble* 23). Those who cross this line of coherence and connectivity were “othered” as deviants.

The authors chosen for the present study violate these norms of continuity and

coherence established by the hegemonic discourse on gender and thus challenge and reverse the norms of heteronormativity. They reject the body as the source of gender identity, the categorization of gender into binary and the norms of compulsory heterosexuality as the natural and only mode of desire. The following chapters illustrate the myriad ways adopted by these writers to evade the senseless categorization into gender binary as they venture to construct a world that allows individuals to own their body and express his/her gender without any social, cultural, or material constraints. These writers speak in their own voice instead of echoing the gatekeepers of transsexuality and critique the transnormative modes of self-expression found in earlier texts. How far the trans life writings exhibit this capacity will be decisive in the direction in which trans theorizations on embodied subjectivity and gender concerns of transgender people will evolve in the 21st century.

Chapter III

Man, Woman, and Trans: Transcending Gender Binary and Stereotyping

The choice between two of something is not a choice at all but rather the opportunity to subscribe to the value system which holds the two presented choices as mutually exclusive alternatives. Once we choose one or the other, we've bought into the system that perpetuates the binary.

(Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw* 101)

Gender is one of the most contested concepts in all contemporary discourses on identity. The rigid categorisation of gender binary is a product of the modern Western world. Anthropological studies have demonstrated the prevalence of cultures where gender was understood and respectfully institutionalised beyond the man-woman binary. A sociological investigation of the emergence of gender from the 18th century will expose the social construction of gender through a set of culturally produced and mediated norms. Contrary to the commonly held belief that gender is a fixed outcome of biological factors, an exploration of the historical development of the codes of femininity and masculinity illustrates the dynamic nature of these societal norms. Rather than being static, they have undergone transformations and adaptations over time.

Ken Plummer, in his foreword to *Blending Genders: Social Aspects of Cross-Dressing and Sex Changing*, describes how the working-class masculinity of late 19th century England varied drastically from the middle-class masculinity of the 1950s. Gender “is a process and not a product. People achieve their masculinities and femininities” (Plummer xiii). This chapter presents the argument that the life narratives selected for the present study provide an alternative and reverse gender

discourse that unsettles the notions of fixity and normalcy that were attributed to gender. Moreover, they challenge the rationale behind classifying individuals into rigid gender categories when gender identity and expression are diverse and fluid, varying from person to person and even evolving over time. By doing so, they unveil the early trans life narratives as being biased and partial in their inclination to conform to and normalize gender binary. The hegemonic transnormative rendering of the early narratives was an ancillary of the heteronormative discourses on gender. As per these narratives, gender non-conforming and gender transcending trans people were deemed as non-existent entities.

Gender is so deeply ingrained in all social institutions, belief systems, actions, and desires, that it presents itself to be completely natural, inevitable, and immutable. Robyn Wiegman in her essay “The Desire for Gender” argues that “Gender was both the effect and the tool of heteronormativity. As a tool, it was the means by which bodies became naturalized into two- part pairs, each with its own affect, ambition, and inclination, each inextricably wed to the other in sexual and social contexts, as male and female” (Wiegman 214). Though taken for granted as a commonplace reality, the maintenance of gender categories demands individuals to practice the same on a regular basis. “Man” and “Woman” exist because people chose to repeat the behaviour and social roles assigned to these categories. The sustenance of gender depends on the practice of social reproduction and repetition. In the opinion of Judith Butler,

Gender is an act, which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. The complex components that go into an act must be distinguished in order to understand

the kind of acting in concert and acting in accord which acting one's gender invariably is. ("Performative Acts" 526)

The way gender has been problematized across disciplines including Sociology, Biology, Feminist discourses, Queer Studies, and Transgender Studies have revolutionized the very basis of identity formation. From the notion of gender as an invariable and natural attribute of a person's biological sex, it has become a highly politicized aspect of an individual's identity. Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna in their 1978 publication *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* argue that gender is a social construction which largely rests on the taken-for-granted theory that gender is a "consequence of a biological blueprint" (Kessler & McKenna viii). Dave King and Richard Ekins refute biological essentialism by stating that "the biological is as much a construction as the social is.... If anything is primary, it is not some biological sign, but what we call gender attribution, the decision one makes in every concrete case that someone is either a male or a female" (qtd. in Ekins and King 15).

Judith Butler's theory of performativity also displaces the biological base of gender categories. In her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" published in 1988, Butler challenges the fixity and immutability of gender by stating that gender is not a "stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed, rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (519). It is nothing but an "illusion of an abiding gendered self" formed through the repetition of unvaried ways of body movements and enactments. For Butler, "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" ("Performative Acts" 527). She challenges the biological essentialist

rationale of gender reality and opines that no pre-existent natural body exists onto which culture inscribes gender identity. According to Butler, gender is prior to any other forms of identity and people become recognizable only through becoming properly gendered in conformity within the recognizable standards of binary (*Gender Trouble* 22). Butler defines gender as 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, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender Trouble* 45). Susan Stryker agrees with Butler and states in her essay “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies” that,

To say that gender is a performative act is to say that it does not need a material referent to be meaningful, is directed at others in an attempt to communicate, is not subject to falsification or verification, and is accomplished by “doing” something rather than “being” something. A woman, performatively speaking, is one who says she is—and who then does what woman means. The biologically sexed body guarantees nothing; it is necessarily there, a ground for the act of speaking, but it has no deterministic relationship to performative gender. (10)

A conventionally gendered body is one that “acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (Butler, “Performative Acts” 527). Since gender is an illusion constructed and sustained through social performance, “the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed” (528).

Butler clearly distinguishes gender performativity from a theatrical performance by marking the “punitive and regulatory social conventions”

(“Performative Acts” 527) that govern gender performance in non-theatrical contexts. By applying Victor Turner’s conception of social performance to gender, Butler states that,

although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this "action" is immediately public as well. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public nature is not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame. Understood in pedagogical terms, the performance renders social laws explicit.

(“Performative Acts” 526)

Butler cites the instance of sighting a transvestite on stage, in theatrical space and in real life. She says, “The sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence” (“Performative Acts” 527). She further explains what evokes these two different responses. The sight of a transvestite on stage always gives one the chance to negate the transvestite’s gender performance and reassure his ideas about gender as real. Butler comments,

Because of this distinction, one can maintain one's sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements; the various conventions which announce that 'this is only a play allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life.

(“Performative Acts” 527)

But in real life, the same performance becomes dangerous because it is devoid of any theatrical conventions that will restrict this act to the imaginary realm, to demarcate it from the real. Thus, a transvestite’s or a transgender’s gender

performance, in general, constitutes a new gender reality, “a modality of gender that cannot readily be assimilated into the pre-existing categories that regulate gender reality” (“Performative Acts” 527). This causes friction and unsettles the social conventions around gender dichotomy. The “rigid regulatory frame” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 45) of gender performance presupposes a few other binaries—the biological binary and the linguistic binary—within which the gender binary become intelligible and socially acceptable. When a trans performativity falls outside of these constrictive choices of biological, social, cultural, and linguistic binaries, it creates dissonance and ambiguity leading to social rejection and marginalization. For Butler, transphobia justifies the illusory nature of sex.

Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all. That this reassurance is so easily displaced by anxiety, that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level there is social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated. (Butler, “Performative Acts” 528)

In this regard, the gender variant performance of a trans person can subvert the essentialist notions of gender reality. Gender variance in its different forms as transvestite, transsexual, transgender, or the more inclusive trans,

can do more than simply express the distinction between sex and gender, but challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality that structures a good deal of popular thinking about gender identity. If the 'reality' of gender is constituted by the performance itself, then there is no

recourse to an essential and unrealized 'sex' or 'gender' which gender performances ostensibly express. Indeed, the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations. (Butler, "Performative Acts" 527)

The discourse of gender binary has constructed certain ideas that have become part of society's common-sense notions about the truth of gender. These ideas cater to the interests of a distinctly gendered category of people and designated the rest as deviants. To ensure that the hegemonic knowledge about gender is kept intact and well maintained, this dominant group engages in strict disciplinary measures to curb any uprising that is definite to unsettle the myth of a fixed and innate gender identity. Gender policing practised by the heteronormative society to sustain gender roles and identities resulted in trans life narratives of the erstwhile century promoting a transnormative gender performativity that consciously simulate the gender binary to offer a culturally intelligible and socially acceptable gender identity. They echoed the transsexuals' attempts to fit in and normalize transsexuals as "real men"/ "real women." As stated by Mason Schrock in "Transsexuals' Narrative Construction of the 'True Self'"

Although the transsexuals challenged some cultural ideas about gender (namely that sex equals gender), their self-narratives reinforced others. Because most people believe in gender differences and assume they are biologically based (Epstein 1988), transsexuals used these essentialist ideas to give plausibility to their stories. Their self-narratives thus supported gender polarization (Bem 1993) and the naturalization of gender (Connell 1987). Thus, even while they sought radical change as individuals, their self-narratives actually reinforced a highly conservative view of gender. (179)

Since the relation between these performative acts, the body and the corresponding gender is arbitrary, “a different sort of repeating” or “the breaking or subversive repetition of that style” is possible which will open up the possibility of gender transformation (Butler, “Performative Acts” 520). On the contrary, the 20th century trans life narratives reiterated the essentialist norms of gender and thus failed to erect a counter-discourse to break the norms of heteronormativity. In their attempt to be conventionally gendered with all the associated stereotypical codes of gender, they largely negated the subversive power of trans manifestations. Their eagerness to normalize the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity reaffirmed the culturally stated dichotomy of gender and adversely impacted the existence of those who stood outside the binary.

The most striking departure, the trans life narratives of the 21st century made was to turn away from following the cultural codes of gender binary as a gateway to social acceptance. These narratives illustrate Butler’s notion that gender being a constructed notion leaves the possibility for reconstituting the same in a different way. With their refusal to pass and their rejection of gender stereotypes, these writers expose the truth of gender identity as a “performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” (Butler, “Performative Acts” 520). By refusing to abide by the conventions of binary gender, they challenge the reified status of gender as immutable, invariable, and natural. The trans life narratives of the 21st century deviate from the kind of transnormativity constructed and circulated by the earlier narratives on trans identity by questioning and refuting the two-gender system. Dallas Denny, the American transgender activist refers to this departure as a paradigm shift. In her article “The Paradigm Shift is Here!”, she mentions how gender binary is being questioned by experts in disciplines like medicine, anthropology, and popular

literature. According to Denny, this paradigm shift will provide a more mature understanding of what sex and gender are, thus replacing the binary. This revolution will provide a new perspective on gender-transgressive people and will open up new options for transgendered people, “living full-time without genital surgery, recreating in one gender role while working in another, identifying as neither gender, or both, blending characteristics of different genders in new and creative ways, identifying as genders and sexes heretofore undreamed of- even designer genitals do not seem beyond reason” (Denny 1). The trans life narratives of the 21st century reflect this paradigm shift.

Jamison Green opines that “identity is not a rigid, monolithic psychological box into which we can place ourselves, where we permanently remain.” Instead, it is a continuing process, “we are all becoming something” and “the tendency to “fix” people’s identities as encompassing only one aspect of themselves, or as being unchanging in their various aspects, is equivalent to expecting a person only to eat apples because he or she was eating an apple when you met” (Green 81). Green rejects fixity not just with reference to gender identity. For him, all are in the process of evolving into someone every day. Janet Mock exposes the non-consensual nature of cisgender attribution which labels one as a man or a woman immediately after his/her birth thus rendering the freedom to choose one’s gender identity impossible. Once gender attributed, the life of gender-variant people becomes a constant struggle against gender conditioning.

Mock states that the first thing she was taught about her gender was that she was a boy. “It was the first thing I’d learned about myself as I grew aware that I existed” (15). What proved her masculine gender identity to her was not how she felt, but the “pronouns, the penis, the Ninja Turtle pajamas, the picture of hours old me

wrapped in a blue blanket with my eyes closed to the world” (Mock 15). The phrase “my eyes closed to the world” is indicative of the absence of an individual’s agency in gender attribution. Instead, one is constantly reminded of this imposed identity by linguistic (“the pronouns”), biological (“the penis”), and cultural (“Ninja Turtle pajamas”, “blue blanket”) codes of the conventional gender binary (Mock 15). Jacob Tobia defines themselves as “gender transcendentalist” (155) and shatters the fixity of gender by stating, “The reality about gender is that we are all morphing all the time. We are all growing and evolving, excavating, and renovating. I will be discovering new facets of my gender until my last breath” (130). Meredith Talusan goes a step ahead and confounds all with her gender and racial ambivalence. The interplay of her androgynous gender expression and albinism defies conventional categorizations of gender and race, leaving onlookers unable to neatly place her within defined boundaries. The “passability” of Jamison Green’s and Janet Mock’s medically transitioned bodies challenges the innateness and fixity of one sex-one gender doctrine of heteronormativity. These authors call into question the gender dichotomous world around them by rendering gender attribution impossible.

The first decade of the 21st century witnessed a drastic change in the use of the term transgender. From a term referring to the notion of transformation, it underwent an ideological evolution as its meaning expanded to encompass the notions of crossing, surpassing, or navigating across gender boundaries. The turn towards this paradigm shift started during the 1990s. Holly Boswell’s article “The Transgender Alternative” published in 1991 acted as a manifesto of the ideological underpinnings of the term ‘transgender’. In Boswell’s perspective, the term ‘transgender’ represents a viable middle ground between being a cross-dresser and a transsexual individual, with its roots firmly grounded in the ancient tradition of androgyny. Boswell posits

that transgenderism stands as an all-encompassing concept, distinct from transsexualism or cross-dressing, which tend to exist in polarized realms. She blames culture for imposing gender binary which prevents a celebration of diversity (Boswell 15). The freedom to choose one's gender for Boswell is a protest sword. She opines that "the transgenderist whether crossing over part-time or full time even while marking their genital incongruity gives honest expression to a reality that defies cultural norms" (Boswell 17).

During the early decades of the 21st century, "transgender" gradually got replaced by trans/trans* to emphasise the transgressive nature of the gender binary. For those who favoured the ideology of identity as existing beyond or outside gender, trans/trans*/ transperson became the term of preference. Richard Ekins and Dave King opine that "the omission of 'gender' in transgender-the wholehearted embracing of the terminology of 'trans' and 'transpeople-become' symbolic of the "going beyond gender altogether" approach which "combined a maximally inclusive approach to the transgender phenomenon with radical politics of various sorts" (*Transgender Phenomenon* 16,23). The life narratives chosen for the current study reflect these shifts in its approach to gender. In the "Author's Note" provided at the beginning of Janet Mock's life narrative, *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*, she states her preference for the term "trans over transgender or transsexual" and her decision to discard the use of the terms, "real or genetic or biological or natural to describe the sex, body, or gender of those who are not trans" (Mock xi). This is indicative of her understanding of trans as one who transcends the bounds of gender as well as of her negation of biology as the base of a "real" or "natural" gender identity. She also disregards the much celebrated link between gender identity and assigned sex as "a matter we do not control, yet one

that continues to frame who is normalized or stigmatized” (Mock xi-xii).

Jamison Green opines that unlike the diagnostic terms “transsexual (indicating a medical condition) or transvestite (indicating a psychological condition), transgender is “a grassroots term.... a self-identity label for some and a useful political term for others.... ‘Transgender’ does not mean people who want to change their sex” (Green 14). At the same time, he agrees with the fact that there are transsexuals who despise being called transgender because according to them they did not transcend their gender. Their claim is that the gender they identify with was the one they were born with, though they were assigned a different one based on their biology. Hence, they prefer to be identified as “transsexual”, people who transcended their sex. Green’s statement indicates the need for a more political and inclusive term to replace both transgender and transsexual. Kate Bornstein states, “I call myself *trans* or a *tranny*- and the latter angers a small group of transsexual women who see tranny as the equivalent of *kike to Jew*” (*Queer X*). Tobia describes themselves as a “gender non-conforming adult” (7) and they use trans and/or genderqueer interchangeably in their narrative.

A significant strategy employed by these writers to question the subjugation of gender-variant people as deviants and abnormal is the acknowledgement of the presence of gender variance as a valid mode of self-expression prevalent in various indigenous cultures. The pre-Christian, pre-capitalized world allowed and celebrated gender variance. There is a vast divide between the cultural enforcement of sex-gender binary and their more fluid and flexible manifestation in real life. The authors chosen for this study proudly retrace their lineage to the two-spirited people of Native American cultures like berdache, the mahu of the native Hawaiian culture, and the baklas of the Philippines, the people revered as the “third gender” in their respective

communities. In the early trans life narratives, gender variance was often pathologized and attributed to modern European medical discourse. But the authors selected for this study proudly align themselves with the rich legacy of gender variance embraced within numerous indigenous communities. According to Leslie Feinberg, the oppression and subjugation of these gender variant people started as part of European colonization and their agenda to institutionalize the gender binary as the universal standard of gender identity. In his path-breaking publication “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come” Feinberg states,

Transgender is a very ancient form of human expression that pre-dates oppression. It was once regarded with honour. A glance at human history proves that when societies were not ruled by exploiting classes that rely on divide-and-conquer tactics, “cross-gendered” youths, women and men on all continents were respected members of their communities. (207)

Feinberg opines that it is not transgender that is new but passing that is historically new (“Transgender Liberation” 206). To understand the promotion of medical transition and passing as a means to eliminate gender variance, it is essential to place it in its historical context. This perspective highlights the influence of 20th-century European sexologists and their agenda, which must be seen as part of a broader pattern of colonial powers seeking to impose their cultural practices onto indigenous cultures. The aim was to homogenize these cultures, forcing them to conform to the norms and values of the colonial masters. Leslie Feinberg’s book *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* published in 1996 provides a comprehensive perspective on how gender variance, once considered holy and respectful, came to be associated with notions of deviance and aberration during the 18th and 19th centuries. None of the early trans life narrators

related their gender variance as a continuation of a cultural practice common in many communities. Instead, they voiced their loyalty to the two-gender system to establish themselves as “normal” and “valid” members of the modern Western world.

The current authors, on the other hand, reject this Eurocentric discourse on gender and deconstruct the same by establishing themselves as members of a long legacy of gender multiplicity. Thus, gender variance gets reconstituted as a continuum with people practising it from time immemorial. Rather than being viewed solely as a construct of contemporary medical advancements, gender variance reclaims its rightful place as a deeply meaningful and legitimate form of expressing individual subjectivity which is as old as human civilization. Kate Bornstein tattooing an ‘ankh’ on her wrist becomes a symbolic gesture of connecting herself with “North African priests and priestesses and holy people of genders neither male nor female” who used the symbol of ankh to mean “eternal life, the divine androgyne” (Bornstein *Queer* ix). For Bornstein, occupying a non-gendered zone is eternal and divine. By tattooing an ‘ankh’ on her wrist, she is imagining herself as continuing the proud heritage of all those who were neither male nor female. Janet Mock explains how she became a victim of the Western interpretation of “mahu” and equated it to ‘sissy’. She describes her attempts to save herself from being identified as a mahu to escape the associated taboo. But later she understood that mahu, people who were assigned male at birth but took on feminine gender identity “embodied the diversity of gender beyond the dictates of our Western binary system” and mahus were respected and celebrated as “spiritual healers, cultural bearers and breeders, caretakers and expert hula dancers and instructors” (Mock 102). A better understanding of gender variance outside the restricting and suffocating Western discourse of gender binary enables Mock to appreciate other similar communities like mahuvahine in Tahiti, faafafine in Samoa

and fakaleiti in Tonga. She also understood why Hawaii was more tolerant and safer for gender-variant people like her (Mock 103).

Mock's opinion that "Historically, Polynesian cultures carved an "other" category in gender, uplifting the diversity, span and spectrum in human expression" (102) should be contrasted with the rigid binary codes of gender practised by the West. It sheds light on the subjugation and oppression exercised by the West against gender variance as part of their politics of homogenization and destruction of the indigenous. Leslie Feinberg remarks,

"Sinful, heinous, perverted, nefarious, abominable, unnatural, disgusting, lewd" - the language used by the colonizers to describe the acceptance of sex/gender diversity, and of same-sex love, most accurately described the viewer, not the viewed. And these sensational reports about Two-Spirit people were used to further "justify" genocide, the theft of Native land and resources, and destruction of their cultures and religions. (*Transgender Warriors* 22)

Mock exposes this adverse impact of Western influence on the polyphony of gender celebrated elsewhere when she states that mahu, who occupied a space of importance between the poles of male and female was pushed to the margins with the advent of the West and its religious dictates on the purity of gender. She comments,

As puritanical missionaries from the West influenced Hawaiian culture in the nineteenth century, their Christian, homophobic, and gender binary system pushed mahu from the center of culture to the margins. Mahu became a slur, one used to describe male-to-female transgender people and feminine men who were gay or perceived as gay due to their gender expression. (103)

For Mock, the impact of her Hawaiian hula dance instructor Kumu Kaua'i, who proudly identified herself as a mahu was enormous. People like Kumu Kaua'i's

reclamation of the mahu identity is equated to people from margins reclaiming the earlier derogatory words like “*dyke, fag, nigger, queer, and tranny*” by Mock. Thus, it emerges as a strategic political manoeuvre to assert one's agency and resistance in the face of subjugation, mirroring the decolonial practice of appropriating the colonizer's language as a means to contest the process of “othering” and its resultant power dynamics. For Mock, Kumu Kaua’i’s identification with mahu without any grudge against the male body she was born with to express her femininity, her decision not to change the body to reflect the binary, her bright floral dress and long hair adorning her male body and the regular presence of her “husband”, “a tall, masculine man” with her, came as revelations to connect Mock’s gender variance to the age-old tradition. It gave Mock the courage to appreciate herself for who she is. She says that she accepted Kumu’s own determination of gender and learned to evolve beyond the binary and “to mirror the movements of my ancestors and give thanks for the island culture that respected various other identities” (Mock 105). Unlike the early trans life narrators, Mock proudly admits her sense of obligation to those trans women “whose resistance and daily battles against policing, exiling, violence, and erasure” made Mock’s success possible. She remembers with gratitude, the fighters of the 1966 Stone Wall Riot or the 1969 trans resistance of all those trans-women from the streets. Mock says, “My foremothers have role modelled, through their lives and works, the brilliance of anchoring yourself in marginalized womanhood” (xvi). Mock’s narrative thus forms part of her attempt to fight the internalized shame about her transgender past. She achieves this by acknowledging the legacy of those trans people who made life possible for people like Mock and by refusing to abide by the stereotypes of femininity glorified by cisgender society.

Talusan also compares her life as an effeminate male in America with that of

being a bakla in the Philippines. Though she never wanted to be a bakla while she lived in the Philippines, the intolerance shown by the White society towards her gender variance made her appreciate her culture for its gender inclusivity. Talusan says,

While my culture tolerated bakla, nobody ever took them seriously, so I wasn't interested in being like them. But maybe because I knew I could dress up as a girl if I wanted to, I also didn't really find the idea particularly exciting, not until I got to America and noticed how men dressing up as women seemed so much more taboo than it did back home. (18)

The insistence on following gender stereotypes, something Talusan was unfamiliar with during her life in the Philippines, forced her to think of medical transition so as to “normalize” her gender identity. She says, “In America, I had to become a woman” because a man wearing a dress or makeup or being feminine will get him beaten up or even killed” (226). For Talusan, the medical transition was not a voluntary choice made by her to conform to the binary, but something she resorted to secure herself from gender oppression. It was a shocking realization for somebody who grew up in the “flamboyant bakla” culture of the Philippines to know that her chest that is not puffed up enough to be masculine, her voice that is not deep enough for a man, her gait that wasn't halting and her swaying hips could make her a target of violence and oppression in America (Talusan 98). By stating that “I would have probably been bakla had I stayed in the Philippines, remained in that more indeterminate space in a culture where that was possible” (109), Talusan expresses her preference to be part of the legacy of gender variance rather than conforming to the rigid gender categorization of the modern Western society.

Green voices a similar approach though he rejects the argument that if society

was willing to accept gender variant people as they are and refrain from insisting on sex-gender conformity, trans people would not have taken dramatic steps like surgical transformation. While appreciating an individual's felt need to own a body in congruence with his/her gender identity, Green admits that if Western society was tolerant enough to accommodate "two-spirit people" "then transpeople would be better integrated without resorting to physical change." Green says that "the popular idea of a 'two-spirit person' is one of peaceful co-existence" (71). One of the many reasons for Jacob Tobia's rejection of the trans narratives propagated by the mainstream media is their refusal to acknowledge the trans history. Tobia critiques the canonical trans narratives by stating that,

It implies—or, at times, outright says—that this whole trans thing is new. That the trans experience is a product of the modern world. As if trans people haven't been around for all of recorded history. As if gender nonconformity isn't as old as gender itself. As if precolonial and indigenous cultures across the world didn't have rich traditions of honouring gender nonconforming, trans, and two-spirit people. As if every trans person on the planet doesn't owe our present freedom to the struggles of generations of gender nonconforming and trans folks who came before. (18)

The reference to these gender variant communities that existed as an integral and legitimate part of indigenous cultures before the imposition of gender binary by the West thus reverses the early trans narratives that portrayed gender variance as deviance and gender dichotomy as natural. As opined by Leslie Feinberg, the prevalence of third gendered people in ancient cultures has a deep meaning for trans in general since it unveils the truth that, "ancient and diverse cultures allowed people to choose more sex/gender paths, and this diversity of human expression was

honoured as sacred” (*Transgender Warriors* 23).

The select 21st century trans life narratives rather consciously strive to be subversive by replacing gender binary performativity with transgender performativity. The most obvious transcending manifest in these narratives is their resistance to being easily subjected to gender attribution by the conventions of heteronormativity. Their refusal to follow the accepted norms of gender in terms of their demeanour makes it impossible to typecast them into any one of the gendered categories. The strategy used by all these authors to subvert the notion of gender dichotomy is to confuse the onlookers and thus make the process of gender attribution, the primary and the most important process that sustains gender dichotomy, impossible. As stated by Suzanne J Kessler and Wendy McKenna, gender attribution “forms the foundation for understanding other components of gender, such as gender role (behaving like a female or male) and gender identity (feeling like a female or male)” (2).

Gender attribution does depend on certain scientific criteria like the anatomy of the human body. But mostly it happens from the perspective of a naive person’s common sense understanding regarding gender. Upon encountering an individual, the primary form of categorization that occurs is gender categorization. There are certain cues one uses to attribute a specific gender identity to another individual. Gender essentialism conceives gender as an inborn and immutable attribute decided by the kind of genital one possesses. Thus, genitals act as an important biological cue to one’s gender identity. This essentialist notion of gender made physical transition play a major role in the medical discourse on transsexuality. But since the biological cues of gender are not always available in initial interactions with an individual, it is mostly the social cues that are used to decide and attribute a gender identity to one. Consequently, gender categorization relies on observable cues such as the presence or

absence of specific external body characteristics, hairstyle, clothing choices, facial hair, and behavioural traits. Those who assign gender and those who get gender attributed as either male or female are therefore expected to be familiar with these conventions governing gender attribution. Kessler and McKenna state that,

Gender attribution is a complex, interactive process involving the person making the attribution and the person she/he is making the attribution about. (This distinction between attributor and other should not obscure the fact that in most interactions participants are simultaneously being both.) The process results in the “obvious” fact of the other being either male or female. On the one hand, the other person presents her or himself in such a way as to convey the proper cues to the person making the attribution.... Part of being a socialized member of a group is knowing the rules for giving acceptable evidence for categorizing. (6)

Gender attribution performs a key role in establishing and maintaining gender binary. It is the process by which one labels another as a male or female. “Gender attribution forms the foundation for understanding other components of gender, such as gender role [behaving like a female or male] and gender identity [feeling like a female or male]” (Kessler and McKenna 2). Gender stereotypes, certain generalizations about how men and women are expected to perform by way of speaking, responding, dressing, and conducting themselves based on their sex thus hold an essential role in gender attributions. Attribution of a gender role to an individual mostly happens within the rigid framework of these stereotypical assumptions.

Gender stereotyping results in according privileges to a limited category of gender roles and gender expressions as normal. Within the context of the modern

capitalist Western world, the two-gender system of man and woman gains prominence, and it gets normalized negating the pluralistic ways in which gender was and can be expressed in cultures other than the white Western society. This leaves gender identities that cannot be compartmentalized into stereotypical categories in oppression and discrimination. With an increased tendency to overstate their adherence to the conventional codes of their preferred gender, the writers of early trans life narratives became abettors in the process of gender stereotyping, the resultant oppression and negation of those trans people who failed to pledge their unflinching loyalty to the normalizing cues of gender identity. Julia Serano further problematizes the idea of gender attribution in her text *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. In her opinion, due to the cisgendered society's belief of gender dichotomy as natural, "the cissexual indiscriminately projects their cissexuality onto all other people, thus transforming cissexuality into a human attribute that is taken for granted" (122). She reasons that gender attribution leads to cissexual privilege that allows them to grant or deny the authenticity of an individual's claim to a particular gender identity. According to Serano, for cisgendered people, their physical sex and corresponding gender identity are considered natural by themselves as well as by those who attribute gender to them and it gets confirmed naturally. This develops a sense of ownership of the idea of gender which Serano defines as "cissexual gender entitlement" (123). They feel themselves to be entitled to their gender. But this overactive sense of self-ownership about gender makes them "broach territory" and feel as if they are the arbiters of others' right to call themselves masculine or feminine. "Because gender-entitled cissexuals assume that they have the ability and authority to accurately determine who is a woman and who is a man, they in effect grant a privilege—cissexual privilege—

to those people whom they appropriately gender” (Serano 123).

Thus, an individual appearing to be male to another cissexual as per conventions, introducing himself as male will be respected and accepted as a male and entitled to all male privilege. But if somebody appearing to be conventionally male introduces himself as female, cissexual entitlement would refuse to grant cissexual privileges of a woman to that person. Likewise, somebody, appearing to be a woman, is revealed to be transsexual, as somebody assigned male at birth, the cissexual entitlement forces the process of regendering and will consider that person as male irrespective of that individual’s identification as a female and deny the privileges of being a woman (Serano 123). Hence, a transsexual passing as a cissexual trying their best to conform to the stereotypes of their preferred gender will be denied entry to that gender category upon the revelation of their transsexual status. Thus, passing, the means used by early transsexuals to gain access to a normal life, becomes an act in futility.

The act of “passing”, critiqued and discarded by posttranssexual ideology in favour of gender non-conformity gets further complicated in Julia Serano’s notions of “passing-centrism.” In Serano’s opinion, the concept of “passing” itself is a product of cissexual privilege and is only applied to transsexual whereas passing is something that transsexual and cissexual does on a daily basis to get proper entitlement to their preferred gender. A cisgender man “who lifts weights every day in order to achieve a more masculine appearance” or a cisgender woman “who puts on makeup, skirts, and heels to achieve a more feminine appearance” are also instances of passing (Serano 133). But the bias, hypocrisy, and prejudice of heteronormative society against trans community ignore those acts as normal and similar gestures on the part of trans person as passing. Janet Mock retorts to the cisgender society’s hypocrisy and

allegation of trans women as doing “the most” to look feminine, that trans women with their dress, heels, lipstick, and big hair are artifice, fake and a distraction, by stating that it is her way of expressing her gender. When wearing make-up is treated as normal for a ciswoman, the same becomes pretension and artificial for a trans woman. For Mock, her “femininity was more than just adornments; they were extensions of me, enabling me to express myself and my identity (147).

A transsexual passes because he/she thinks that it is the only way to get entitled to cissexual privilege. Serano remarks, “Because I’m a transsexual woman, if I roll out of bed, throw on a T-shirt and jeans, and walk down the street and am generally recognized by others as female (despite my lack of concern for my appearance), I can still be dismissed as “passing” as a woman” (133). Tobia critiques this prejudice and gender policing against gender variant people in their narrative. When digression from the codes of binary is permissible for those who present themselves as cisgendered, transpeople are under constant and strict surveillance to ensure that they follow these codes of binary without fail. Tobia remembers, “Once I’d been marked as a sissy, everything was fair game. My every behavior, every mannerism, every inclination was put under a public microscope, available to all for interrogation and inspection” (31-32). Tobia’s every gesture and activity were assessed and judged with the biased cisgender gaze to blame and isolate them for their gender variance. They recount being constantly subjected to this gender policing:

Oh, Jacob, you still like coloring books? You’re such a girly girl.

You don’t want to play football? What are you, a sissy? Oh yeah, you are.

Why do you like crafts so much? Only sissies know how to braid. (44)

Green also questions this double standard of heteronormative society that unreasonably critiques everything a transsexual does as “passing” or “deception”.

When passing went to the extent of self-betrayal in the case of early transsexuals, people like Green draw a line of demarcation between passing done to fit in within the binary and the gender manifestation of an individual. Green opines that the gender expression of a trans man is as organic as that of a cisman. Only because one identifies as a trans man, his gender need not be taken as artificial. He says,

We are a group of men who do not achieve gender membership through our genitals, yet we are still accused of buying into stereotypical gender roles simply because we are transsexual men and have a masculine appearance, because we have beards or a particular musculature. (191)

According to Green, condemning a transsexual as an imposter and a “conservative conformist” (89) without asking about his politics is unreasonable. This tendency to generalize transsexuals as “buying into stereotypical gender roles” (191) stems from a limited number of specific transsexuals exhibiting such behaviour. Green is indirectly expressing his dissatisfaction with those trans people who “gravitate to the extremes of stereotypical, culturally defined gender behaviour” (Green 89) to gain social sanction as evident in the early trans life narratives.

All the canonical trans life narratives show a blind adherence to these gender-specific rules or stereotypes to ensure that there is congruity between the gender felt by them and the gender attributed to them by society to maintain the self-image of possessing a pure and unambiguous gender identity. According to Julia Serano this cisgendered majority’s gender attribution makes trans life invisible. She states that “while most cissexuals are unaware that cissexual assumption even exists, those of us who are transsexual recognize it as an active process that erases trans people and their experiences” (123).

The texts chosen for the present study do make a deliberate distancing from

following the gender conformity of earlier authors. Instead, they prove that there is a distinction between gender identity “an individual’s own feeling of whether she or he is a woman or a man, or a girl or a boy” (Kessler and McKenna 8) and gender attribution, the social categorization of one individual as male or female based on the available cues or cultural codes pertaining to each gender. By replacing gender conformity with gender variance, they confounded the cisgender society’s expectations regarding gender performance. In essence, gender identity is the self-attribution of gender, one that is independent of the gender attribution made by others.

Bornstein, Green, Mock, Tobia, and Talusan resist the binary gender attribution and thus transcend the limits of gender dichotomy. They not only deny the stereotypes of masculine and feminine gender but even challenge the hackneyed notions of the imperfect trans body. Jamison Green and Janet Mock presents themselves as conventional man and woman in their appearance and clothing but unsettles the fixity of gender categories by declaring their transsexuality. Their transitioned bodies transcend and challenge biological essentialism. They use their bodies to challenge the fixity of biological sex, the idea that the sex one is born with is immutable and the ideal carrier of a corresponding gender identity. The ease with which they carry their transitioned bodies, and their transgender identity thus negate the essentialist ideas of sex and gender. The onlookers quite comfortably attribute conventional gender identities to them judging by the seemingly perfect alignment manifest between their body and their expressed gender. But with the revelation of their transsexuality, Green and Mock taunt the staunch followers of gender dichotomy and biologism. Green makes use of the apparent gender-sex alignment of his transitioned body to subvert the conventional grounds of gender attribution based on the appearance of the external body. The first chapter of his life narrative titled “How

Do You Know” exposes the follies of the assumptions followed by culture to know one’s gender and sex. He unveils the mutability of the visible signifiers of culturally accepted codes of gender. Green’s “perfect” male exterior, his bald head, deep voice, and athletically built physique, are paradoxically juxtaposed with his revelation that he was assigned female at birth (Green 1). Green thus uses his visibility as a transsexual to erect a counter-discourse to challenge biological essentialism and to bring home the truth that gender is not what one sees outside, but how one feels inside. Green refuses the notion of gender as something to be attributed or assigned by an external agency. Instead, an individual’s gender can only be either interpreted or misinterpreted by another one. Green says,

I propose that gender is the interface between our psyche and our cognitive mind/body/sex. I conceive of gender as an aspect of personality, of the way we manifest who we are in the world. When we express negative judgment about another person’s gender expression, whether that judgment comes from our own conservatism (supporting a rigid gender dichotomy that disdains fluidity), or liberalism (supporting a wide variety of fluidity of gender expression that disdains rigidity), we are expressing a lack of tolerance for diversity, a lack of appreciation for individuality. (193)

Green thus replaces gender attribution or assignment with individual choice, “Gender belongs to each individual to do with as he or she pleases” (Green 190). He also replaces the preference of a mode of gender expression over the other, cisgender over transgender or transsexual over trans with mutual acceptance and respect.

Janet Mock had become the target of her community’s envy because of the perfectly passable body she owned post-transition. Her quintessential female body embodied “‘realness’ and ‘femininity’ beyond performance” and would have made it

possible for her to exist in broad daylight as a “real woman” fulfilling all the “norms, expectations, and ideals of cis womanhood” (Mock 116). But for Janet Mock, the passability of her body and the resultant respect and validation she received from society were forms of “objectification and sexism masked as desirability” (Mock 156). Rather than using this body to promote heteronormativity, Mock used this body to further trans activism and awaken people to the absurdity of the notion of gender binary based on biologism. By being open about the truth of their transitioned body and their transsexuality, these authors reverse the blind fidelity to gender dichotomy promoted by earlier trans narratives. Kate Bornstein’s description of herself as an “old lady or an old whatever” (*Queer* 21) places her outside the limits of the gender binary. Though a medically transitioned trans woman, she does not call herself a woman. Post-transition, Kate grows more confident in her androgynous identity. For her transition was not a coming home to the right gender and right body, but a journey to the “wisdom of androgyny” (Bornstein, *Queer* xviii). She knows that her assertion of herself as “not male, not female” will “shatter the natural order of men and women” and she “looks forward to the day it does” (Bornstein, *Queer* x).

When the early trans life narrators struggled to fit in to sustain binary, Bornstein deliberately detached herself from the binary to shatter the existing order of the world which oppresses and subjugates some in the name of gender. Bornstein uses the phrases “gender change” (*Queer* xiv) and “sex change” (*Queer* xvii) interchangeably in her narrative to refer to her transition surgery. Earlier authors preferred sex change under the aegis that gender is fixed and their gender is what they were born with. Hence, they change the only changeable attribute which is sex. Their ingrained resistance to accepting gender as a constructed entity was a reflection of their gender-conformist approach. But for Bornstein gender and sex are both highly

malleable. For Bornstein, gender is a protean entity mutable as per one's choice. She describes her relationship with gender as one of constant "incarnations as *man* then *woman* then *neither*" (*Queer* x). Bornstein's idea of gender does not end with binary. For Bornstein, her personality and her gender were both on the "borderline", "the impossible state of gender that exists between man and woman" (Bornstein, *Queer* xi). Gender gave her multiple options to experiment. Her final identification of herself as one with no gender, as one who is neither male nor female strikes at the very roots of gender conformism.

For Talusan, her medical transition from male to female didn't bring any visible magical transformation to her appearance. Talusan rejects the widely celebrated narrative convention found in early trans life stories that emphasize the miraculous physical and mental metamorphosis attainable through medical transition. Instead, she wholeheartedly embraces a comment from her friend who met her after her transition that, "She changed genders and looks more like she did twenty years ago than any of us" (Talusan 13). Talusan also narrates her journey from a gender-conscious and gender-conformist transsexual to a posttranssexual least bothered of convincing the gendered world of her gender truth in her narrative. She states how she grew wary of responding to the cisgender society's demand to conform to any one gender, to be visibly gendered so that it makes the process of gender attribution easier and thus the sustenance of binary more effective.

I used to look really different when I wore heels, dresses, and a full face of makeup nearly every day. But as I put more and more of my thoughts out into the world, I also grew wary of the need to conform to that world's expectations of me....Though I hoped my belief in my own womanhood also came across, regardless of how I looked. (Talusan 13)

She grew confident in her inner sense of being a woman and got rid of all the paraphernalia of femininity that she thought she needed to own to belong. Transcending the stereotype of women as wearing heels and makeup and girly clothes is her way of presenting gender as beyond the idealised versions produced by heteronormative society. Earlier trans life narratives insisted on gender-specific clothing and presentation of oneself as prerequisites to substantiate their gender identity claims. It was a mandatory trait for men identifying as women to wear makeup and dress and women identifying as men to hate both if they were to get entry into the realm of true transgenders. Talusan's decision to unfollow this mandate echoes her gender transcendence. She says, "Though the change between old and new me wasn't as drastic as it used to be. I'd cut my hair in a bob and was not wearing makeup, had on a loose grey jumpsuit that could be feasibly worn by a man or a woman" (12). Talusan describes the phase of her life when she tried to conform to the cisgendered notions of femininity as one without a "solid sense of oneself", during which she had "been more than willing to clamp down on my most undesirable traits" because then she had "such an unclear sense of who I was beyond other people's reflections of me" (12). It is this urge to present oneself in other people's reflections of a "truly gendered" person, which forced the early transsexuals to conform to gender stereotypes. But Talusan does not identify herself with that tradition of early gender conformism and passing. She says,

I knew about transgender women like Christine Jorgensen and Renée Richards, had even seen that trans *Playboy* model interviewed on a talk show, maybe on Donahue. But I didn't recognize myself in those women because, apart from being white, they all seemed to deny their past in a way that didn't resonate with me. (192)

For Talusan, a rejection of passing in favour of “the possibility of exploring what it meant to be perceived as a woman without needing to be one, to embody womanhood without needing to relinquish manhood” appeared to be more appropriate choice.

(192)

Green critiques these “unconventional conventions” followed especially by trans women. Most of the trans women he saw “were mired in gender stereotypes” which puzzled him. He is highly censorious of those transnormative trans women who believed that the “only way to exist in a female body was to be equipped with a purse and clip-on earrings, and to have perfect mastery of them” (Green 73). The authors chosen for the present study boldly deny this urge in favour of a world that will validate individuals for virtues other than their gender conformism. Talusan, reflecting upon her gender-neutral image in the mirror, states that,

I wondered to what degree the image in front of me conformed to what was real, but as soon as I wondered this, I also reminded myself that there is no single, objective truth, how reality is so much more malleable than people make it out to be, that the first step in making something real is believing that it could be real, that my very presence in front of this mirror, in this school, in the world, was itself proof of the power of belief in a reality that seemed entirely farfetched. (15)

Tobia also voices a similar opinion when they say, “I think that the best way to break through stereotypes is to embrace who you are no matter what, and this is who I am” (242). All these authors, through their bold gesture of transcending the gender binary, imagine a future which is not genderless, but one in which gender becomes a personal choice. These authors resort to self-validation of their gendered embodiment as real by reversing the cisgender society’s accepted cultural codes of gender and by

refusing to subject oneself and one's gender identity to be corroborated as "real" by the hegemonic discourse of gender binary. They understood gender as a subjective truth that can vary from person to person. For them believing in their version of gender as real form the first step towards gendered self-actualization.

Jamison Green defines gender as a "system of classification that describes characteristics and behaviours that we ascribe to bodies" called masculine and feminine. These attributes "change between cultures or change within a culture over time" (Green 5). Green cites the example of how certain occupations, once gender specific like secretary, telephone operator, bank clerk etc. have become gender neutral after passing through a feminine phase and certain fashion statements like wearing one's hair long as feminine and short as masculine underwent change and have become less likely to be interpreted as gender statements. For Green, gender is not a fixed and invariable truth to be imitated but something that undergoes evolution and change. In his perspective, there is nothing wrong with a beautiful woman with a sweet voice, long hair and a gorgeous body exhibiting the strength to lift a park bench and possessing a deep voice. He says, "Generally most women can't lift park benches, most women don't have really low voice. But that doesn't mean this particular woman is not a woman" (Green 5). Instead of denying the preferred gender identity to an individual because he or she deviates from the stereotypes attached to a particular gender, culture should learn better ways to understand the precarious nature of gender as against the fixity of the same propounded by the hegemonic discourse of gender dichotomy. Green argues that rather than stating "she's really a man," describing her as "strong, beautiful, with a sexy voice" (Green 6) would immediately help to erase the gender bias through which society judges people.

Green speaks about how the heteronormative society's gender conditioning

affects individual development. This compulsion to fit in, to conform, leads a trans person to shame and self-loathing. Assigned female at birth, Green was frequently perceived by others as a boy irrespective of his choice of cloth (gender-neutral jeans and a T-shirt or a dress) when he was a child. Those who knew Green's assigned sex found this wrong identification absurd. But for Green, absurdity occurred when he was interpreted as a female and when he thought that he "was absurdly expected to act in ways that would support their beliefs not my own" (Green 12). Green was expected by society to ignore how he felt about himself to conform to the gender attribution he was subjected to by society based on his sex. This internalization of self-hatred goes a long way in deciding the course of action opted by a trans person to materialize their gender identity. Passing is one such measure adopted by post-operative trans individuals to conform to the rules of heteronormative society. Green objects to this compulsory and non-consensual categorization of individuals into the gender binary. According to him, gender attribution based on appearance is unreasonable. Gender, for Green,

belong to each individual, to do with as he or she pleases; it is not possible for an "objective" observer to paste gender onto another person by labelling them with a gender that the person does not feel, whether or not that gender is expressed.... because gender, even though it is imposed by society, is also a private matter, aspects of which *may or may not be* publicly expressed, and it cannot be wholly abstracted from the subjects (conscious or unconscious) control. (190)

Hence for Green, the sole authority to define one's gender identity is entrusted to that individual. Green thus demands autonomy in identifying oneself with any gender. It is also not imperative that one manifest the chosen gender-appropriate

behaviour in public. That too is under the prudence of the sovereignty of the individual. According to Green, no “objective” observer has the authority to assign gender to another individual. The use of double quotation marks around the word ‘objective’ serves as a subtle emphasis on the heterosexist bias of those who categorize people within the binary system. Kessler and McKenna’s observation on how culture attributes gender to one without his knowledge or consent is significant in this regard. Upon being asked about one’s gender identity, the expected answer is one that is congruent with the external evidence of gender specificity presented by the individual. Only those who present themselves in the cultural codes of the masculine/feminine gender are expected to identify as male/female when asked “What is your gender? This, in the opinion of Kessler and McKenna, happens because of the equating of sex and gender identity. Although the inquiry, “Are you male or female?” could also be understood as asking, “How do you perceive your own gender?” or “How do others classify you?”, it seldom assumes these nuances. As stated by Kessler and McKenna, this is primarily because, in everyday understanding, there exists no compelling rationale to separate gender identity from gender assignment; the prevailing perspective simply acknowledges gender as a unified concept. Kessler and McKenna deplore the individual lack of agency in gender attribution. They state that

In any event, gender identity is what the person feels she/he is, regardless of the gender attribution other people would make about her/ him, and regardless of the validity of our techniques for determining gender identity. To claim that your gender is what you feel yourself to be ignores the fact that people almost always attribute gender without asking one another. (Kessler and McKenna 9)

Richard Ekins and Dave King use the term ‘transgendering’ to refer to the ideological shift found in the treatment of gender in the life narratives of 21st century

authors. Unlike ‘gendering’, the social process of categorizing one into any one of the two genders, transgendering starts with a desire to perform the gender codes that “entail the crossing of the borders that the initial (and subsequent) classification into two has created” (Ekins & Dave King, *Transgender Phenomenon* 34). In contrast to the earlier terminology used to refer to cross-gender behaviour (transgender/transsexual) as a permanent move from one gender to the other, transgendering classifies the process into four major modes. The first one is referred to as migrating, the process of crossing from one side of the gender border to the other permanently. The medical model of transgendering is a clear instance of the migrating model. The second variant, oscillating stories involves moving across gender borders temporarily. When migrating tales, the elements of which we see in most transsexual autobiographies of the 1950s’ projected the act of ‘being’ in one gender, oscillating stories, stories pertaining to transvestites and drag kings and queens gave more prominence to the act of ‘doing’ a gender.

Negating, the third category of transgendering effects ‘ungendering’ by those who attempt to invalidate the accepted gender categories of masculinity/male and femininity/female. They place themselves outside the gender divide. The fourth mode of transgendering called ‘transcending’ are stories of being gender-full’ of going beyond genders, entering a third space” (Ekins and King, *Transgender Phenomenon* 36). The monolithic authoritative voice of the hegemonic gender discourse gets replaced by the personal narratives of the individual and the invariability of gender binary is rejected in favour of gender diversity with a view to deconstruct and reverse gender dichotomy in these narratives. Instead of promoting the cultural enforcement of gender categories, these authors, even those who underwent medical transition, construct a sense of ambiguity between the way their body is sexed and the way they

perform their gender leading to a deliteralization of gender categories. Instead of the earlier transition stories of regendering, these writers documented their transcending stories which largely promoted ungendering through conscious and deliberate denial of the formulaic norms of masculinity and femininity. They even challenged the stereotypical transgender identity that the earlier literature on transnormativity professed.

Ekins and King also identified five subprocesses by which a trans person accomplishes transitioning from one gender identity to the other. They are erasing, substituting, concealing, implying, and redefining. Erasing refers to the removal of the visible aspects of femininity or masculinity like castration in trans women and hysterectomy in trans men. Substituting involves the act of replacing the body parts, cloth, speech, and behaviour of one gender with that of the other. A trans woman replacing a penis with a vagina is an instance of replacing. This is typical of all the canonical trans life narratives whereby instead of ungendering, they regender from one sex-gender category to the other with all the physical and cultural insignia of gender binary. Concealing is the act of hiding things that contradict with a person's preferred gender display like tucking the penis or binding the breasts. Implying is the subprocess by which an individual implies certain body parts or gender attributes to match his/her preferred gender expression. For instance, a male-to-female transvestite may refer to his beard as facial hair to get rid of the cultural connotation of masculinity attached to the word 'beard'. This subprocess dominates trans stories of oscillation. Redefining happens when the gendered attributes of the body and behaviour are redefined with an intent to subvert or go beyond the binary divide. This is the prominent sub-process of transgendering in negating and transcending stories of transgendering.

The move within, between or beyond genders can occur within and between these five modes of transition. The authors chosen for the present study include those who crossed the divide permanently but with an intent to eliminate the divide as well as those who seek to go beyond, unlike the life narratives of the earlier period which glorified the permanent transition from one gender to the other through medical help so as to fit in any one of the two gender categories. Transgendering designates movement across, between and beyond genders. In the classic migrating stories, substitution is the dominant subprocess. The “transgender migrant” (Ekins and King, *Transgender Phenomenon* 46) is reconstructed by substituting the attributes of one gender with the other. This process of substitution involves not just the body but even the way the body is clothed, adorned, and managed. By quoting Virginia Prince’s handbook on *How to be a Woman Though Male* (1971), Ekins and King draw attention to the extensive stereotyping of gender that took place as part of substituting one gender with the other in the stories of transgender migration. According to Prince, men trying to become women must “try to be more gentle, less direct, less forceful and more delicate and graceful in your movements” (qtd. in Ekins and King, *Transgender Phenomenon* 50). In the life narratives of transgender migrants, they mostly claim or imply that they naturally possessed all those gendered ways of presenting themselves with no additional learning to justify their migration as inevitable and natural. While the earlier trans literature was dominated by stories of migration and the personal narratives of those who crossed the divide permanently, contemporary trans literature has broadened itself to allow space for oscillating, negating, and transcending stories of trans identity formation.

The 21st century witnessed the surging prominence of nonbinary/genderqueer identities in America’s public life. Instead of gender-specific pronouns, gender-

neutral pronouns like ‘they’, ‘them’, and ‘their’ became popular. Such developments in trans discourse were directed towards addressing the obvious denial of subjectivities existing outside the binary. Leslie Feinberg popularized the idea of transcending the linguistic boundaries of gendering by using gender-inclusive pronouns like ze/hir as early as the 1990s as part of giving “careful thought to our use of pronouns, striving for both clarity and sensitivity in a language that only allows for two sexes” (“Transgender Liberation” 206). Though such practices existed even before, they took on the form of a popular mode of resistance with the advent of the 21st century.

Mostly, the traditional approach to transgender study is to limit transgender identity to that of binary transgender experience. Transgender, by extension, includes only trans women or trans men. This is problematic because binary transgender is not inclusive of the full spectrum and complexity of the trans experience (Darwin 317). Narratives by nonbinary trans people were absent in the canon of early trans life narratives. All the early narrators of the transgender experience identified themselves within the binary. Until recently the studies conducted on trans life narratives were also limited to the binary transgender narratives. This underrepresentation of nonbinary gender categories both in medical and psychiatric discourses and popular literature on trans left a research gap in the 20th century as well as in the early decade of 21st-century transgender studies. “Nonbinary Gender Identities- Fact Sheet” published by the Society for the Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity of American Psychological Association states that “Research questions about gender and gender identity should include options beyond ‘male’, ‘female’, and ‘transgender’” (Webb M.S et al.).

The second decade of 21st century trans discourse reverberates with terms like

genderqueer, genderfluid, nonbinary, agender, pangender, bigender, or gender non-conforming. A non-binary gender is one that does not fall within the categories of male or female as well as that of trans man or trans woman. “It is important to acknowledge that nonbinary gender identities are not new identities or new concepts and have been recognized throughout the world for as long as gender has been a conscious identity of humans” (Webb M.S et al.). But they started appearing in the political discourse on gender with an intent to deconstruct the binary only recently. The gender and identity attributes one associate with being non-binary or genderqueer are subjective. These two terms are often used interchangeably though there are minute distinctions between the two. For a gender non-binary person, gender does not exist as a decisive aspect of his identity. They conceive their identity as separate from gender. A genderqueer is a person who does not subscribe to dichotomous gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders. The term nonbinary is widely accepted as an umbrella term to include all the gender manifestations outside the binary including genderqueer. This thesis will use the terms genderqueer and gender nonbinary as synonymous since the authors chosen for the current study do not differentiate between the two and identify both as genderqueer and gender nonbinary.

People who claim allegiance to the ideology of the nonbinary resist all modes of gender segregation in ways better than that of a transgender who seeks recognition in one of the two culturally recognized gender categories. Nonbinary discourse has advanced gender self-identification beyond all the biological, social, and cultural markers of gender as the final word in one’s gender identity. Unlike the early trans life narrators who used their self-identification with a particular gender as a means to access medical transition and thus to be a member of the bi-gendered social structure,

nonbinary gender discourse with their disavowal of binary gender eliminated the need for transition. Thus, they challenge the compulsory and nonconsensual gender attribution of a gender variant individual by the dominant ideology as either a man or a woman. They resist being interpellated by the ideology of gender dichotomy as submissive subjects and refused to manifest their gender preference externally through the accepted codes of culture like a rightly sexed body, gender-specific clothing, or gender-specific pronouns. As stated by Jessica A Clarke in her article “THEY, THEM, AND THEIRS” published in 2019, “nonbinary people may have any number of relationships to the gender, including to name a few, hybridity, rejection, dynamism, insistence on a third option, subversion or all of these” (905). It includes gender hybrid categories like bigender, pangender and androgynous identities. Most of these categories adopt gender rejection “avoiding stereotyped expectations” regarding gender (906). Some resort to gender fluidity, “gender identities that are not static over time” (907) or gender subversion, “parody or deconstruction of gender Binary” (907).

Jacob Tobia’s life narrative should be read in this changed axiom of the understanding of gender in the 21st century. A routine Google search result for transgender life narratives listing Tobia’s memoir as one is an indication of the reconstitution of the very canon of trans life narratives during the 21st century. From the stereotypically gendered transsexual as the true representatives of transgender, the ideology of trans identity construction has expanded and transformed to include people like Tobia who transcend all these norms of gender conformism. Tobia defines themselves in their life narrative as

I am not a man. I am not a woman. I am a glimmering, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, beautiful human person, and I don’t identify that way for fun.

I don't identify that way because I think it makes me interesting. I don't identify that way as a hobby. I use that language to describe myself because it is fundamentally who I am. (279)

For Tobia, their life narrative is “a timely and *oh so needed* challenge to people who believe that there's only one trans story to tell” (Tobia 14) which “glamorizes trauma” and “depends on trans people existing solely in the man-woman binary.... fitting into the gender binary, being a “real woman” or a “proper man” (Tobia 15).

Jacob Tobia's relation to their gender is an amalgam of hybridity, rejection, subversion, and dynamism. Tobia adopted a humorous tone for their memoir, which is quite unusual for a self-narrative on gender dilemma. They wanted people to talk and laugh about gender, instead of developing a traumatic relationship with gender. Tobia imagines a future that treats gender as a playful thing, where there is no patriarchy, no misogyny, none of the things that make gender an everyday struggle. For them, “Gender is not serious, or at least, it shouldn't be. Taking our own gender or the gender of others too seriously results in a world where gender must be rigid, must adhere to consistent rules and regulations” (Tobia 17). When interviewed by Trevor Noah, Tobia described themselves as “gender chill” (00:02:21), an approach that allows for transgression and experimentation with gender without being worried about sticking to the watertight compartments of gender dichotomy. This approach helps people to engage with their gender playfully allowing freedom to individuals and an opportunity to live without being traumatized by gender. According to Tobia, strict adherence to the binary will restrict human freedom. Tobia comments, “If ‘being a man’ and ‘being a woman’ are always treated as serious things, we perpetuate a world in which human possibility is confined” (17).

Tobia dismisses classical trans narratives that define an individual in terms of

his/her glamorized gender trauma. Tobia does not prefer to narrate themselves in those terms. On the contrary, there are other more significant aspects of their life in terms of which they wish to describe themselves like “the fact that I am a decent writer, the fact that I am a resilient person who has found healing, the fact that I am goofy as hell, the fact that after decades of being understood by everyone as white, I’m finally beginning to explore what it means to be an Arab American” (Tobia 15). Tobia thus rejects the conventional narrative terms of classical trans life narrative to let the world understand that a trans person should not be judged merely on the basis of his/her gender identity and ability to conform to the stereotypes of gender. Tobia also states their decision to transcend the man-woman binary glorified in early narratives because they are “bored of our culture’s obsession with binary-oriented storytelling.” According to Tobia, “trans storytelling gets better without the gender binary as the goal. The story opens up. Free from proscriptive binary boundaries, we are able to tell stories that don’t come with an inevitable conclusion, and the possibilities become as endless and varied as the world around us” (16).

Tobia discusses the futility of considering gender identity as consistent in their narrative. Every early trans life narrative promoted the idea of a consistent identification with one gender as the core of their transsexual subjectivity. All the early narratives used the cliched declarations, “I’ve always known I was a girl” or “I’ve always known I was a boy.” As people seeking membership in one specific gender, consistency of identity was demanded of their narratives. Tobia comments, as trans people, “We’re supposed to say that we’ve always had a rock-solid identity and sense of self; otherwise, our identity seems weak, uncertain, fallible” (16). But for Tobia, the notion of a consistent gender identity is an illusion. Every individual carries traits of both genders to different degrees. Gender is not a stable entity, but a

moving, changing, evolving one. Tobia thus rejects the idea that gender is consistent and states that,

As people, our identities change over our lifetimes. This applies to transgender and cisgender people alike. Everyone has a gender that evolves. Even if you identify as a woman, what it means to be a woman is never the same from day to day. Or, if you identify as a man, the way that your manhood manifests will be different throughout your life. (16-17)

Tobia reverses the conformist narratives of early texts by being ambiguous about their gender identity while growing up. Tobia distances themselves from conforming to the binary by stating that they loved their pink Barbie dolls and blue Power Ranger alike. Though they identify themselves as a woman, they do not restrain from revealing that,

I didn't know that I was a girl. And forgive the double negative, but I wasn't sure that I wasn't a boy, either. I just knew that gender was kinda stupid and that I wanted to play with Barbies, get dirty in the creek behind my house, and kiss the blue Power Ranger real bad. (Tobia 16)

Douglas Mason Schrock cites the common childhood stories like “actual or fantasized cross-dressing experiences, getting caught cross-dressing, and sports participation”, recounted by early transsexuals for the narrative construction of their “true transgender self” (179). Clothing is a major means of gender attribution. Most transsexuals viewed their tendency to cross-dress as evidence of their cross-gender identification. Most trans life narratives of the 20th, as well as the 21st century, relate such stories. According to Schrock,

The most commonly accepted evidence of transsexualism in the transgender community was cross-dressing or fantasizing about cross-dressing as a child. The age at which one began such activities was significant because

transsexuals believed that the "true self" was most likely to express itself at an early age. (180)

Janet Mock recounts how she stole her grandmother's dress and she was scolded by her mother telling her "You are not supposed to wear dresses" (Mock 21). Later Mock used dressing up as a woman with all its expected paraphernalia to challenge the gendered norms of clothing set by the cisgender society. She says, "My body, my clothes and my make-up are on purpose, Just as I am on purpose" (147). Mock's purpose in being a woman with all the appurtenances of conventional feminine clothing despite the fact of her being born a male and assigned masculine gender, thus shatters the foundational notion of gender purity on which the entire discourse of gender binary is built. For Green, "a dress was a form of subjugation that concretely symbolized [his] lack of power to assert [himself]" (Green 10) and wanted to wear "pants and a shirt that felt infinitely more comfortable" (11). For Talusan, while growing up in the Philippines where gender variance was tolerated as an aspect of their culture, a man wearing a dress was not that unusual. Since it was not a forbidden fruit, Talusan was never drawn to wear one before. But after she reached America, she wore a dress for the first time and "shivered at that forbidden thrill I'd only known about second hand, of being a man in women's clothes" (Talusan 18). Tobia states that they "wanted to wear dress" (34) and remember the excitement they used to feel initially thinking about dress-up time. For Tobia, dress-up time was associated "with a sense of longing. . . to experiment with my gender" by wearing pink and frilly garments (4). But societal pressure to conform made Tobia give up dressing up altogether. Tobia remembers that "Through social pressure and gentle correction by teachers, I was steered away from anything with the slightest edge of femininity. Eventually, my options became so limited that I gave up dress-up time altogether"

(Tobia 5).

Tobia opines that every child should be allowed to experiment with one's gender and considers the social compulsion to conform as cisgender society's encroachment into an individual's freedom to make his/her choice. Tobia states gender policing is not some abstract, intellectual concept; it is a pattern of emotional abuse that came from every direction and singularly robbed me of my childhood. I'm sharing this with you because I want you to understand that telling a boy not to wear a dress is an act of spiritual murder. Most of all, I'm sharing this with you because it is true, and things that are true need to be said.

(48)

Tobia's narrative advances cross-dressing as a means of protest and self-assertion in the face of cisgender society's compulsion to conform. Earlier authors cross-dressed only in their private space and maintained gender conformity in public before the transition. They wore the clothes of their preferred gender after erasing the apparent "incongruity" between their body and gender through medical transition. Thus, they contributed to the sustenance of gender binary and conformity.

While early narratives spoke about the power of clothing to hide and conform, Tobia's narrative talks about the politics of clothing as a means to reveal and express and to revolt against essentialism. From a child who had "given up on clothing as a source of joy" and had been "shot down, bullied, or isolated every time" Tobia becomes one with "many aesthetic preferences" and wore "what was deemed as women's clothing" disregarding social ostracization. Tobia describes themselves as one for "whom clothing is perhaps the most important signifier of individuality, self-worth, self-love, and affirmation; for whom distinctive (albeit not necessarily expensive) clothing is imperative" (Tobia 94). Tobia's use of the phrase "distinctive"

does not relate to the conventional gender-distinctive mode of clothing, but one that is distinctively preferred by an individual as per his/her subjectivity. It need not always be in conformity with socially and culturally approved standards of gendered clothing. The idiosyncratic ways of Tobia's dressing designate their use of clothing as a means to unsettle the conventions and cultural codes of gender conformity. They wore women's clothes to all the major events they attended. The "sky-high, matte black faux snakeskin heels" (Tobia 220) they wore to the reception in the White House, "a simple enough BCBG dress with a blue floral pattern" (Tobia 289) they used for their graduation ceremony, and their "Hillary pumps to U N Headquarters when Ban Ki-moon and Ricky Martin spoke at a big event promoting Free & Equal, the United Nation's first-ever campaign for LGBTQI rights" (Tobia 235) were all their means to normalize gender transgression and nonconformity. Throughout the narrative, Tobia seems to be obsessed with their fascination for heels, which symbolize femininity for Tobia. They associate all the significant milestones of their life with the kind of heels they wore. The first major event that invited media attention to Tobia and their gender queerness was the charity run across the Brooklyn Bridge. They completed the run wearing heels as a way to transgress social norms. They did so as a way to "make some very public statement" about who they were and to "reclaim my gender, to own it more loudly and with more vigour than I ever had before" (Tobia 244). According to Tobia, cross-dressing or drag "When used properly is a radical tool that challenges the gender binary by mocking it, heightening it, exaggerating it, or rejecting it altogether" (Tobia 195).

Tobia also talks about the manifold ways the cisgender world attempts to redirect gender non-conforming to the water-tight compartments of binary. One such instance Tobia refers to is the use of the word "professional" in the workspace.

Though it may appear to be a “neutral word, merely meant to signify a collection of behaviours, clothing, and norms “appropriate” for the workplace”, it is, in reality, a word “loaded with racism, sexism, heteronormativity, or trans exclusion” (Tobia 227) and aims at homogenizing people by erasing differences. The mandate to be professional does not only affect gender variant people, but all those who are different from the norm set by the Whites. Tobia states,

If you’re black, “being professional” can often mean...avoiding black cultural references, or not wearing natural hair. If you’re not American, “being professional” can mean abandoning your cultural dress for Western business clothes. If you’re not Christian, “being professional” can mean potentially removing your hijab to fit in, ...ignore your need for kosher or halal food, sucking up the fact that your office puts up a giant Christmas tree every year. If you’re low-income or working class, “being professional” can mean spending money you don’t have on work clothes.... If you’re a woman, “being professional” can mean navigating a veritable minefield of double standards. Show some skin, but don’t be a slut. Wear heels, but not too high, and not too low, either. Wear form-fitting clothes, but not too form-fitting. We offer maternity leave but don’t “interrupt your career” by taking it. And if you’re trans like me, “being professional” can mean putting your identity away unless it conforms to dominant gender norms. (Tobia 227-228)

Tobia also critiques how the gender-conformist society calls into question their intellect, competency, and ability because they do not follow the codes of professional clothing which is gender-conforming, “simply because my gender is different” (Tobia 228).

Another evidence produced by trans people to substantiate their claims to a

true gender self was their inclination towards specific types of games and sports.

Male-to-female trans always claimed that as children they preferred to play with dolls and female-to-male claimed their inclination towards sports and athletics. Apart from this, as stated by Schrock,

they also had to explain away prior involvement in activities that signified their unwanted gender identity. If a male-to-female transsexual had been successful at sports or had signified conventional masculinity most of her life, this history had to be reinterpreted to support her new gender identity. (183).

Tobia narrates incidents of cross-dressing and their desire to play girl games and girl characters with other girls (Tobia 4). At the same time, they do not resort to the denial of their ease of loving boys' toys. Tobia is proud and confident of who they were while growing up and does not resort to hiding or denial to project one attribute of their gender as real over the other. The masculine was as normal and integral to their subjectivity as the feminine. Tobia says, "I wanted to wear pants and dresses, bow ties and skirts. I wanted Barbies and an Easy-Bake Oven to accompany my science kit and bug collection. And for most of my early childhood, the part that I struggle to remember, I had no shame about what I wanted" (25).

Thus, for Tobia, writing his life narrative is a means for "resisting convenient labels and embracing authentic ambiguity" to "challenge the tenet that gender must be consistent and immediately legible to others" (Tobia 17). Tobia offers a counter-discourse to the conventional conformist discourses on gender when they state that their femininity came as naturally as their masculinity to them and as a child they wanted all the gender they could get (Tobia 25). There is an interesting juxtaposition and reversal of gender stereotypes that they resort to in their narrative to lay bare how gender conditioning impacts the beautiful blend of genders that a child enjoys before

being initiated into the world of gender binary. As a child, Tobia says, in “quintessential” little boy style they wanted to run around to play in the dirt, splash in puddles, frolic in the woods, sword fight with a stick. They loved playing with bugs, considered spiders the coolest animals and fancied lizards and snakes (Tobia 25). All the physical activities they loved and their love of bugs, spiders and snakes are all stereotypes conventionally attached to the masculine gender. But at the same time, they say they also loved “colouring and doodling and sparkles and feathers... Arts and crafts ...excelled at gymnastics and relished seeing how gracefully I could move my limbs. I loved to dance, to shake my body all over and feel the beat and move my hips and kick my legs and spin in circles.” Tobia was not ashamed of this blend of genders that they enjoyed. It was a time when “for every ounce of masculinity, of rough-and-tumble boyhood, there was an ounce of femininity. My gender was balanced tit for tat” (Tobia 25). Tobia describes this “pre-shame” phase of their life as “scarce and beautiful.” All this changed as they grew when culture wanted them to confine their gender expression to any one of the two sanctioned categories. Tobia says, “I almost feel as if gender-based trauma is what activated my memory itself because my ability to remember coincides almost perfectly with my inability to express my gender safely” (26).

According to Tobia, as an adult their identification as a genderqueer is part of their attempt to “revive that early part of my consciousness. I am attempting to resurrect the dead memories of this blissful period” (Tobia 26). Tobia’s description of their early memories as a blend of genders questions the popular notion of gender as innate and unadulterated. On the contrary, according to Tobia, one becomes conventionally gendered as a result of social conditioning and culture’s insistence on a pure core gender identity. Tobia states,

I am both Eve and Adam, groping about in the wilderness, trying to get back to Eden. It will likely take the rest of my life to return to a gender that is free of shame. I will spend the rest of my life trying to resurrect who I was when I was four. But perhaps this is what we all do. Or at least, this is what we all should do. (26)

When the conventional narratives abstained from mentioning anything that would challenge their claim to their gender identification, Tobia says, “As a child, I had absolutely no shame about my gender or about my body. None. Just zero. To the degree that it was kind of a problem” (23). For Tobia, their femininity was as natural as their masculinity (Tobia 25) and they felt proud of their ability to “gender shapeshift” (Tobia 26). Instead of considering themselves as a deviant in need of gender correction, Tobia, as a child understood that their “difference was beautiful, was natural, was fundamental” and their gender “special” (Tobia 96).

Language plays a major role in the construction and sustenance of gender binary and stereotyping. The majority of languages use gender-specific pronouns. Hence every time an individual is addressed using these pronouns, the process of categorizing and reaffirming his gender specificity gets repeated. The simple process of hailing someone thus carries gendered connotations. Hence, for a genderqueer, the act of being addressed using any of these gender-specific pronouns becomes an obvious denial of his gender identity. Responding to being hailed so adds up to his sense of shame and trauma. Ekins and King while discussing substitution as a subprocess of the migrating stories seen in early trans life narratives say that substitution does not end with sex reassignment but extends to the different aspects of gender based on which cisgendered world attributed gender to one another. According to them, “Migrating will commonly involve many other substitutions. Among these,

probably the most common are substitutions of names, pronouns, titles, and so on. Linked to this may be bureaucratic substitutions such as changes to driving licences, insurance documents, and so on” (*Transgender Phenomenon* 51).

Adopting the gender-specific name and pronoun of the preferred gender is thus an important step towards gender conformism. There is a linguistic insistence to identify oneself within the gender binary to which transpeople of the past century responded positively. Apparently, it was impossible not to get categorized as male or female and thus avoid gender because of the prevalence of a gendered language. This linguistic oppression becomes evident again in the use of derogatory terms to refer to people who transcend the strict binary. Leslie Feinberg in his essay, “Transgender Liberation: A Movement whose Time has Come” elaborates upon the emergence of such practices and traces their origin back to the time of European colonization. For instance, Feinberg, while referring to the Native American “two-spirited community” popularly known as “Berdache”, states that “‘Berdache’ was a derogatory term European colonizers used to label any Native person who did not fit their narrow notions of woman and man. The blanket use of the word disregarded distinctions of self-expression, social interaction, and complex economic and political realities” (21). But for Tobia, and for people like Tobia, this linguistic gendering was least acceptable and hence they denied gender-specific pronouns as a means to negate gender binary constituted through language. Just as Tobia rejected the substitution of sex, they rejected the substitution of gender pronouns to fight stereotyping. They did not change their sex or their name to present themselves in their preferred gender as a woman. Instead, Tobia adopted the means of gender neutrality not just with respect to the pronouns with which they identified themselves, but with every aspect of their identity. Tobia proudly says,

I started playing with new ways of talking about myself. I started using gender-neutral pronouns when people asked. I wasn't 'him' anymore. I was 'them.' I wasn't 'he' anymore. I was 'they.' I started to correct other people when they got it wrong. I stopped saying I was 'gay' and started saying I was 'genderqueer.' I stopped saying I was a 'man' and started saying I was a 'person.' I stopped saying I was a 'guy' and started saying I was a 'flaming-hot mess of a queen.' (246)

According to Eris Young, "The question at the heart of the pronoun debate is fundamentally one of autonomy - the ability of a demographic, especially a marginalised one, to name itself and thus claim agency or control over how it is referred to, and by extension, treated" (55). Tobia, by preferring gender-neutral pronouns thus ensures agency in deciding their identity outside the monopoly of the stereotypical gender binary which gave them the power to stand up for themselves.

I started telling people on campus—professors, students, administrators, everyone—that they shouldn't call me 'he' or 'him' anymore, that I wanted to be called 'they' and 'them.' I felt a new sense of power because I was finally learning to stand up for myself; because I was finally acknowledging that my gender deserves to be accommodated and treated well by other people, even if it requires them to use language and pronouns they aren't used to. (Tobia 285)

Naming is hence an important attribute of one's identity. It does not only apply to individual naming but also to how a hegemonic discourse marginalizes the weak by naming them using terms that oppress them. Tobia says, "We can never underestimate the power of naming something, the power language has to transform our consciousness" (95). In the case of trans people, until recently, they were described using terms coined by the heteronormative society to address them. More

than the officially sanctioned labels, what gained currency were the derogatory terms used by those in power to oppress gender variant people. People who do not conform to neatly laid boundaries of male and female were addressed using terms of insult like ‘sissy’, ‘faggot’ or ‘tranny’. As opined by Feinberg, “We didn’t choose these words. They don’t fit all of us. It’s hard to fight an oppression without a name connoting pride, a language that honours us” (“Transgender Liberation” 206). Feinberg introduced the term “transgender”, an umbrella term to include all those who stood outside the binary as a replacement for the derogatory names used by the gender normative world to refer to trans. But the writers of the 21st century went a step ahead and reclaimed those terms of insult as a means to register their resistance. Tobia was once insulted and marginalized even by their family for being a ‘sissy’. But they retort to this insult by using the same word as the title of their life narrative as a way of reclaiming a slur word as a source of pride. This is symbolic of their transgressive approach towards the norms and conventions established by heteronormative society regarding gender as well as their negation of the ways used by the cisgendered society to subjugate the gender variant.

To the question of the interviewer Trevor Noah regarding the rationale of titling their book *Sissy*, Tobia says “Sissy was the first word that I had to name my difference. I didn’t know the word transgender when I was a kid...so naming it ‘sissy’ is about reclaiming my childhood for myself” (00:01:01- 00:01:14). When all the early trans life writings strove hard to erase the truth of their gender-ambiguous past, Tobia titled their memoir *Sissy* to reclaim their past. Tobia also state that they wanted to snatch back the power from people who used to tease Tobia by calling them “sissy” by retorting to those people that “oh you shouldn’t be like that...if you think you are going to tease me with that name, it’s the title of my damn book now. So, Sorry”

(00:01:23-00:01:28). In their book Tobia recalls how “sissy” was the first category assigned to them by the world. Tobia says, “Sissy was the first gender identity I ever really had. It was the first word that was ever applied to my difference. Before gay, before transgender, before genderqueer or nonbinary or gender nonconforming or GNC, sissy was the first word the world ever gave me” (31).

In their book, Tobia narrates how initially these terms of oppression affected their life. It all started when their brother started attending school where, according to Tobia, children take up the task of gender policing influenced by the kind of social conditioning they are exposed to. Tobia unveils how social institutions like schools impart gender conditioning which forces children to discriminate against those who did not fit in neatly within the binary.

Children who conform to masculinity or femininity, who excel at “being boys” or “being girls,” are granted social status, and those who can’t or won’t perform their gender roles correctly are immediately ostracized. Across the board, from teachers and principals to pop culture and TV shows, this behavior is not only permitted but encouraged. (30-31)

Encouraged by his education to derogate behaviour that is not strictly masculine or feminine, Tobia’s brother gave them the label “sissy.” Tobia remembers, “All of a sudden, in my own home, I went from being a person to being a sissy” (31). Tobia’s statement that he went from a “person to being a sissy” indicates the extensive denial of individuality and autonomy and marginalization they confronted once they got labelled as sissy which relates to the situation of trans people in general. For Tobia, this label of identity became a “source of shame, a scarlet letter, my cross to bear” (31). Tobia narrates their pain and trauma like this,

When I first looked my gender in the face for real, when I first acknowledged

my pain, it terrified me. There was just so much of it. It was everywhere. How could I possibly start to heal? My pain consumed me, hanging like a spectre over my life, pathways of trauma seared into my neurons, the words sissy and faggot perpetually ringing, revisited again and again. (6)

Tobia describes how the lack of a proper word to refer to their gender identity left them in the dark without being able to define their own gender and made them a victim of the heteronormative world's subjugation.

Growing up, I didn't have the words trans or genderqueer. I didn't know that I even counted as trans until I was in my twenties. I didn't really have any positive ways of thinking about myself, my femininity, or my gender. Instead, I just knew that I was a faggot, that I was a sissy. (9)

Janet Mock also laments how the lack of a proper term to describe her gender made it impossible for her to feel at home in her preferred gender identity. She says, "Like many young trans people, I hadn't learned terms like trans, transgender or transsexual -definitions that would have offered me clarity about my gender identity" (80).

Conventional trans life narratives projected this oppression as the legit response of normal people on seeing aberrant ones. They took the crime on themselves and hated themselves for being who they are. They desperately wanted to correct themselves by realigning their bodies and by perfecting their gender performance to match their gender preference. Thus, they all fell victim to the gender stereotyping practised by the hegemonic discourse on gender. Referring to the classical binary transgender narrative, Tobia says, "By showing how desirable it is to be gender conforming and 'pass' as a man or woman, this narrative reiterates the idea that gender non-conforming trans people are less-than and should be lucky to be treated as the gender with which they identify" (14). But Tobia subverts this narrative

trope altogether when they state how they turned their ‘sissy’ identity into a source of self-love and self-respect. Instead of trying to reconfigure themselves to fit the expectations of the gender dichotomous culture, they resisted it and embraced themselves the way they are. By the power of self-love and their refusal to abide by the rules of gender binary, Tobia transformed these words of hatred into “badges of pride” and “beauty marks” (Tobia 9). Tobia says,

at the age of twenty-seven, I adore the words sissy and faggot. I take pride in them. They are a cherished part of my history, a beautiful piece in my life’s menagerie, transformed from lead to gold by the alchemy of self-discovery and self-acceptance. I’m the shiniest, queenliest, sparkliest faggot that I can be. I’m the most effervescent, gorgeous, dignified sissy that the world has ever seen. I own it. I live it. And this book is, at least in part, the story of how that came to be. (9-10)

Tobia’s decision to distance themselves from the “classical binary transgender story” (Tobia 12) becomes evident in the very beginning of the narrative as they dedicate the book to all irrespective of gender. Tobia says the book is “For all the girls, who deserve power instead of cruelty. For all the boys, who deserve gentleness instead of violence. For all of us in between; for all of us outside; for all of us beyond” (Tobia vii). They brilliantly reverse gender stereotyping by associating girls with power and boys with gentleness. By stating that there is the rest of them who are in between, outside or beyond the binary, Tobia repositions transgender as people who transcend gender contrary to the conventional idea of transgender as occupying a space within the binary. In their interview with Noah, Tobia said that the transgender world’s notion about cispeople having a stable gender and hence a simple gender is a myth.

For Tobia, there is nothing called stable or simple gender. This statement

indirectly relates to their notion of gender and related trauma as applicable to everyone, boys, girls, and trans alike. In Tobia's opinion, conflicting interaction with gender is universal, irrespective of one's gender. Everyone undergoes this struggle to balance on the gender tightrope and comes to terms with gender in their life. Though Tobia admits that their pain of identifying as a woman in a male-assigned body and the resultant masculine gender attribution was different, they did not restrict this gender identity crisis to transpeople alone. When Tobia states, "Everyone struggles with their gender identity. Every boy, no matter how butch, struggles to fit in with the other boys. Every girl, no matter how femme, struggles to feel woman enough" (1), Tobia is making a conscious effort to normalize and generalize gender identity crisis. Conventional trans life narratives glorified this gender trauma in their narratives as the first sign of their gender disorder. The ideals of masculinity and femininity, that the earlier trans people sought desperately to achieve become unattainable and nonexistent even for conventionally cisgender individuals in Tobia's scheme of gender. Tobia, thus challenges and devalues the images of "real man" and "real woman" that every transgender strove to become in the past. Through this deliberate attempt to challenge the conventional modes of depicting gender in trans storytelling, Tobia transcends the gender stereotypes not only of masculine and feminine, but even that of transgender.

They also state that gender healing is required not just for gender variant people but also for conventionally gendered ones. They cite the ignorance of this fact as the greatest shortcoming of the trans movement. Tobia opines,

Perhaps the greatest oversight of the trans movement thus far is that it has positioned gender-based trauma as something that only trans people experience. As a result, there are millions of cisgender, heterosexual people—

particularly men—who have never coped with the trauma they’ve experienced, who don’t even recognize their experiences as trauma in the first place. (7-8)

Tobia thus overthrows the cisgender claims regarding a stably gendered self by stating that all undergo gender trauma. He says, “It isn’t a question of whether you’ve had gender-based trauma in your childhood. Everyone has had some. Rather, it’s a question of what degree of gender-based trauma you’ve experienced” (8). For Tobia, transphobia is an externalization of cisgendered society’s gender trauma inflicted at a young age probably because as part of gender conditioning, they were asked not to do certain things they wanted to do. Tobia also thinks that they further get traumatized when they see a trans person freely experimenting with and expressing their gender without prohibitions or inhibitions. Tobia thus effectively erases the cis/trans divide by universalizing gender trauma (Tobia 13).

Through such extensions, reversals, and subversions regarding gender variance and gender trauma, Tobia successfully explodes the myth of an ideal gender type. According to Tobia, certain gender expressions become the norm and certain others abnormal because of social conditioning. The world shuts down gender possibilities for people at a very young age. Instead, gender should be an open-ended entity where everyone gets an opportunity to experiment with gender. They reject the essentialist idea of a single core gender identity. Instead, gender for Tobia is like an onion without “a center, a core, or a discernable middle” (11). Gender is not a journey with a single destination, but it is multilayered and multidimensional. Tobia also negates the idea of certain gender expressions deemed as right and others as wrong. For them, each layer of gender is “meaningful, and with enough time and proper preparation, each layer is delicious” (Tobia 11). They do not believe that “young boys

who want to wear pink should be compelled to mute their heart's longing. I don't believe a child should have to sacrifice his love of unicorns in order to make friends and receive affirmation from adults" (Tobia 8-9).

Tobia's narrative also critiques the compulsory invisibility to which gender non-conforming people are forced because the popular transgender movement represented only those who conformed to the ideals of femininity or masculinity in their chosen gender identity. People who flaunted gender queerness were sidelined by the movement that supposedly stood for people who transcended gender. Tobia narrates the incident of them attending the annual LGBTQ pride reception in the White House. To convey the politics of their gender, they attended the reception wearing high heels and makeup expecting to find and befriend many such in the reception because they knew that there were other gender nonconforming people invited for the reception. But to their surprise, they understood that they were the only "sissy" to attend the reception in a gender non-conforming attire. Tobia was the only person with "facial hair and high heels" there. The question Tobia raises here, "There are definitely trans people here, but where are the other nonbinary/ genderqueer/ gender nonconforming femmes like me? Where are all the other sissies?" is of much significance as it lays bare the conformist attitude of trans people in general to gain social acceptance (Tobia 220). For Tobia, it is not conformism but a rejection of conformism that marked the success of their life. Their motto is "Sissy, femme, queer and proud of it, dammit!" (Tobia 286).

Kate Bornstein, though technically a transsexual, after recognizing the follies of her attempt to become a culturally coded woman, voices a similar gender ideology in her narrative. Just as Tobia flaunted their "sissy" gender identity, Bornstein felt proud of her "tranny" self, another slur word used to insult the gender variant

population. She too promoted a gender non-conforming politics and paraded an androgynous gender performance that constantly left the gender binarist world around her feeling insecure. Bornstein describes herself as a dyke-lesbian-bionic tranny with her right knee made of “Titanium and space-age plastic” (*Queer* x). This reference to her artificial knee interestingly alludes to her medically constructed female body which drastically failed to make her feel like a “real woman” as claimed by earlier writers. Throughout the narrative, Bornstein refers to herself as tranny and repeats the doctrine of Scientology that “thetans have no gender” (*Queer* 129). Though it was Scientology’s philosophy of “no gender” that attracted her to this cult, later she understood that just like all the other religions and social institutions, Scientology too had no space for the gender variant. Like Tobia, Bornstein also laments the absence of a name to represent those who stood outside the binary. Referring to her father Paul Bornstein and Ron Hubbard, the leader of Scientology, Bornstein states that,

their generation’s system of sex and gender refused to acknowledge the self-proclaimed genders of hundreds of she-males, he-she, dykes, fags, drag queens, drag kings, butches, femmes, cross-dressers, uniform fetishists, or anyone else who danced in the dark funhouse mirrors of my daydreams and nightmares. There were no words for any of that. (*Queer* 18)

Janet Mock politicizes her narrative by addressing the issue of media stereotyping of trans womanhood. When the early narrators glorified the stereotypes of cis womanhood available and internalized that, Mock talks about a graver situation. Media projection of trans women as murderers, modern-day freaks, or tranny hookers (xv) forced Mock to deny her transness initially. She lived in perpetual denial of her transsexuality and presented herself as a “real woman”. She even broke her relationship with her community thinking that this would lead to her being conceived

as a typical trans woman of media projection. Mock says,

I struggle for years with my perception of what trans womanhood was, having internalized our culture's skewed, biased views and pervasive misconceptions about trans woman Instead of proclaiming that I was not a plot device to be laughed at, I spent my younger years internalizing and fighting those stereotypes. (xiv-xv)

For Mock, more than her desire to be part of the cisgender community, her desire to protect herself from being part of this media-constructed stereotypes of trans women encouraged her to 'pass', to live in silence of her transsexuality.

Mock also hints at the hypocrisy of the media that glorifies "the right" kind of trans woman- "educated, able-bodied, attractive, articulate and heteronormative" (Mock xvii). Thus, heteronormative society even tries to normalize trans by ascribing the qualities that they think are exceptional and in conformity with cisgendered society's notions about being successful. These adjectives used to describe a successful transgender person mirror the biases and prejudices of a cisgender-dominated society. Thus, a "successful trans individual" is one who aligns with traditional gender norms. This includes being perceived as having an 'able body' that adheres to sex-gender binary, which is 'attractive' in terms of cisgender society's notions about a perfect and seductive feminine body conforming to conventional ideals of attractiveness as defined by cisgender society and embracing heteronormativity by adhering to gender norms and identifying as heterosexual. In the eyes of the public, these characteristics define what it means to be a successful transgender woman. Mock also initially internalized all these norms and felt proud of herself for being the exceptional or unique trans woman. But this standardization of successful trans by the hegemonic discourse of gender binary excluded those trans

women whose bodies, even after transition, could not erase the marks of their assigned sex and gender and fit into the measures of an ideal male or female body. Mock voices her sense of guilt and regret for leaving her “sisters” to join the privileged group. For her, it is only when she felt “unapologetic about the layered identities I carry within my body, and reclaiming the often erased legacy of trans women’s survival that enabled me to thrive as a young, poverty-raised trans woman of colour” (Mock xvi).

All these authors critique the cisgender society’s practice of validating a certain class of trans women as “authentic” and “good”. Mock states that such stereotypes should be deconstructed and contextualized to

shed light on the many barriers that face trans women, specifically those of colour and those from low-income communities, who aim to reach the not-so-extraordinary things I have grasped: living freely and without threat or notice as I am, making a safe, healthy living, finding love. These things should not be out of reach. (Mock xvii)

These narratives fulfil the need for an inclusive genre of trans life narratives. As stated by Jacob Tobia in their memoir,

We deserve more expansive portrayals of trans lives. It’s time for trans folks with the messiest identities to step up to the plate. It’s time for gender nonconforming and nonbinary trans people to get the mic. It’s time for trans people of colour to shape the story. It’s time for low-income and rural trans people to guide the narrative. It’s time for disabled trans people to set the course. It’s time for indigenous trans people to get the whole damn stage. (19)

Mock and Tobia demand trans discourse to discard its fascination of the “real” through their negation not just of the formulaic notions of the conventional gender

binary, but also of those trans manifestations that are celebrated and normalized as better than the rest.

Another very prominent narrative trope visible in all these narratives is an interesting and deliberate reversal of cisgender stereotypes to bring home the truth that these cliched images of femininity and masculinity are constructed lies employed by heteronormative hegemony to sustain gender binary and male domination. Jamison Green describes how the cisgender world's preference for masculine gender led to their double standard in their approach towards people with cross-gender identification. A girl identifying as a boy is usually more tolerated by society than a boy behaving like a girl. It becomes rather easier for a trans man to sail through cisgender society than it is for a trans woman. There is a hierarchical prioritization of masculinity as normal and better practised by the cisgender society that treats women and femininity as inferior. When an individual, "fortunate" enough to be born as a male and live as a man, identify himself as a woman, it becomes intolerable and abnormal for patriarchy. Whereas a girl identifying as a boy is tolerated and at times her tomboyishness is appreciated. There is a considerable degree of invisibility and lack of pathology attributed to a female-to-male trans than that of a male-to-female. A woman wearing a jeans and shirt- the conventional male attire-is still accepted as normal than a man wearing a dress. This is indicative of the extended application of the heteronormative world's gender bias and gender discrimination to the trans community. Julia Serano opines in this regard that,

The idea of masculinity as strong, tough, and natural while femininity as weak, vulnerable, and artificial continues to proliferate even among people who believe that women and men are equals. And in a world where femininity is so regularly dismissed, perhaps no form of gendered expression is

considered more artificial and more suspect than male and transgender expressions of femininity. (9)

Green says, there is a double standard with respect to cross-gender behaviour in childhood exhibited by girls as opposed to that exhibited by boys. Girls get subtle pressure to conform, mixed with disapproval as they get older. But boys get positively slammed if they act like “sissies” when they are young” (Green 70). Green also rejects the cisgender society’s allegation that a woman transitioning as a man is in search of male privilege. According to Green trans men are not in search of male privilege but in search of a “consolidation of their own identity: they want to be seen as themselves” (Green 72).

Kate Bornstein and Jacob Tobia employ the tone of humour and satire in their critique of these gender stereotypes. Bornstein challenges the belief that an individual is innately endowed with the gender performance corresponding to their sex by stating that gender is all an act which needs a lot of skill to make it look real. For Bornstein, her ability to convincingly portray and convince the public of her male identity, even while identifying as a woman, serves as a testament to her exceptional acting prowess. “I had a lot of skill in making myself look and act like a real boy”, says Bornstein (*Queer* 4). Bornstein hints at the mass media’s stereotyping of women as “cute and dumb” (*Queer* 15). Imbibing these media depictions, Bornstein also attempted being cute and she linked being cute to being a woman. She says, “In my young mind, the fact that I identified with cute proved that I wasn’t a boy” (*Queer* 15). The men of her family were all representatives of hypermasculinity, alpha wolves who “own things...territory... mates...children” (Bornstein, *Queer* 14). According to Bornstein, her father was a “male chauvinistic pig.” Gender in her family was simple: “Real he-men were supposed to hate women, or at least know they’re a whole lot better than

women. Husbands behaved proprietarily with their wives” (Bornstein, *Queer* 17). Bornstein critiques the male gaze of the female body and how “size matters” if one wants to be on the list of “ideal and preferable women.” she describes herself as “fat phobic” because in a cisgender society even “fat was gendered” (Bornstein, *Queer* 29).

According to Bornstein’s mother, “Girls can be solidly built, but it is not all attractive and it can quickly turn to too fat. Not boys though. On boys, a little extra meat is healthy” (Bornstein, *Queer* 30). Hence, the first step for her in becoming a girl was “to stop eating” (Bornstein, *Queer* 126). Her attempts to fit in as the slim, beautiful girl made Bornstein look so thin and weak. The medical interpretation of her thin body was also gendered. Since she owned a male body and gender, her condition was called anaemia. “Anorexia was for girls” (Bornstein, *Queer* 43). The first piece of advice her mother gave her when she accepted Bornstein as a woman was to attain the ability to conjure tears whenever she wanted because it is something every girl needed to know (Bornstein, *Queer* 30). Following the medical transition, Bornstein found herself being subjected to the objectification of the female body, reducing her to a mere commodity for the patriarchal gaze—a role confined to being a mere “breeding stock” (Bornstein, *Queer* 195).

Apart from critiquing these stereotypes, these authors also resort to a reversal of these cultural codes of gender with an intent to showcase the vulnerability of gender binary. For instance, Kate Bornstein, as a boy was scared of blood. The sight of her father’s nose bleeding scared her, and she was cursed by her father because she “screamed like a girl” (Bornstein, *Queer* 8). As a boy, she was not expected to scream. Screaming was for girls and fainting at the sight of blood was a feminine attribute. Later, after Bornstein’s transition to a woman, she becomes a sadomasochist

who enjoyed pain and the sight of blood. She says “I’m not a sadist-strictly a masochist. I’m the one who gets whipped, paddled, cut open and pierced” (*Queer* x). Bornstein presents an interesting juxtaposition of her masculine and feminine selves as well as role reversals parading an androgynous demeanour throughout her narrative and thus transcends binary. Sporting a moustache was manly and wearing a headband girly. Bornstein did both to satisfy the compulsion of society to be male and her inner urge to be a woman (Bornstein, *Queer* 67). She was simultaneously the “able-bodied seaman” who could climb up the top of the yardarm to untangle the signal flag and the fragile scared woman who “threw up” once she was behind the closed doors of her cabin (Bornstein, *Queer* 91). All her three marriages, according to Bornstein, were her attempts to retain her manliness. Negating the heteronormative romanticization of a man proposing to a woman, Bornstein was at the receiving end of the question, “Will you marry me?” (Bornstein, *Queer* 94). It was Bornstein, “the husband” who fell asleep in wife’s arms with head on her chest (Bornstein, *Queer* 101). It was Molly, “the wife” who looked after the business while Bornstein enjoyed rain (Bornstein, *Queer* 104). Bornstein is thus comfortable and less ashamed of being a “girl who is partly a boy” (Bornstein, *Queer* 227). Gender was not a strict binary for Bornstein, but “a space, one that includes many more than two genders” (Bornstein, *Queer* 202). Gender, she says, is an act that takes time and effort. When she first became a girl, Bornstein says, “I had to learn girl from the ground up, just like I’d to learn boy. It wasn’t pretty” (*Queer* 183). Bornstein’s statement that just as she played being a boy, she had to learn and play being a girl reverses the early trans claim of their preferred gender performance as naturally occurring to them. Gender, whether assigned or attained, becomes part conscious and part automatic repetition of the culturally accepted codes of gender for Bornstein.

Bornstein also remembers how, after internalizing the patriarchal notions of the ideal female body, she felt ugly. She struggled to come to terms with her female body which looked nothing like the airbrushed images of celebrities published in *Playboy*, *Elle*, or *Vogue* (Bornstein, *Queer* 183). She attended all the one-to-one coaching available to train herself in “How do you dress a man’s body to look like it’s a woman’s body?” or “How do you make your guy face look like a girl?” (Bornstein, *Queer* 184). She tried to act more and more like the stereotypical woman and observed every woman to learn how “women moved through the world-posture, gestures, styles of interaction, speech patterns, the expression of different emotions” (Bornstein, *Queer* 170) to become a conventionally gendered woman. Later, it was through her association with lesbian feminists, that she understood how deeply she “had bought into the heterosexist mainstream transsexual narratives of the day” (Bornstein, *Queer* 168). This knowledge prompted her to stop trying to be the woman of the American dream, to yank her “attention off adorable and on to the practical reality of living as a woman in a world of misogynists” (Bornstein, *Queer* 169). Earlier trans life narratives described their transition journey as one from uncertainty to certainty. Bornstein mocks all such accounts by describing her life as one of paradoxes- the paradox of being neither man nor woman. Bornstein reverses the claimed ease, comfort, and euphoria of earlier trans women by voicing her continuing uncertainty about her gender. “I wasn’t all that sure I was a woman” is her response to her female identity. Just as in theatre, in real life also she performed not one but her “three genders” (Bornstein, *Queer* 191-192). Throughout the memoir, Bornstein repeats the idea that gender is an act. It is something one learns as part of survival for Bornstein. She says, “prior to my life in Scientology I’d been trying to learn boy at the same time I was secretly trying to learn girl. I was successful as a boy, and I never

showed anyone the girl I believed myself to be” (*Queer* 51). When conventional narratives portrayed their assigned gender as acting and the preferred one as natural, Bornstein reconceptualizes the whole discourse by presenting both as learned performances. The key to being a man or woman is “play” (Bornstein, *Queer* 42). Both masculinity and femininity were not “real” but staged representations of gender for Bornstein. By embracing an androgynous gender, Bornstein transcended the stereotyping and gender conformism of both gender binary and transsexualism.

For Green, “There is nothing wrong with wanting to break away from gender stereotypes There is also nothing wrong with gender variance” (Green 87). Green, along with the negation and reversal of gender stereotypes, resorts to the exposition of the insecurity and hypocrisy of the cisgender society in accepting trans people as normal human beings like them. Even after the medical transition and in possession of a “typically masculine” body, Green was not validated as a man by the cisgender public. They frequently made implied references to his pre-transition female identity. While living as an assigned female, Green was taught cooking, housework, how to serve guests and to sit and stand properly with legs together, not to roughhouse or climb a tree as part of gender conditioning (Green 11). His mother thought that he will grow up to become a “handsome woman” (Green 16). After his medical and legal transition to a man, he was still considered by his neighbours and family as a woman. When he visited his family and neighbours to ensure their safety during the Oakland Hills Firestorm, Green’s assistance was sought in the kitchen to “pack up food” while the “men” moved the invalids into the car. For them, even after his transition and its visible results on his body, Jamison Green remained “Jamie Green with a moustache” (Green 201). Accepting a transsexual as equal to biological men or women was unnerving for the cisgender society as it questioned the alleged stability of their

world. Society expects male-bodied persons to be masculine and female-bodied to be feminine. Once assigned a particular gender based on the body, it remains to be the permanent identity of that person. Cisgender society finds it difficult to realign their understanding of gender to accommodate those who transcend the boundaries of sex and gender. When somebody doesn't fit the cisgender expectations of gender "particularly if the dichotomy is highly visible, it can make some people uncomfortable, even angry when they feel they don't know how to classify the person they are observing or when the other person's gender qualities threaten the observer's sense of confidence in his or her gender" (Green 6). Earlier trans narratives spoke about the discomfort trans people felt in public regarding their gender expression. But Green reverses this by talking about how such performances affect the confidence of cisgender stability. While early narratives talked about their sense of insecurity in front of the "purity" and "fixity" of gender binary, Green deconstructs this discourse by ascribing this sense of insecurity to the cisgender society regarding the collapse of the constructed nature of the gender binary.

Green also challenges the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity fostered by cisgender society and exposes their meaninglessness. Green reveals the ambivalent nature of these stereotypes. For instance, fine-motor dexterity is a gendered attribute culturally assigned to femininity. It is praised in a man if he uses it to do something "manly" like tying fishing flies or building model railroads or ships in bottles or playing a musical instrument" (Green 6). The same attribute will make a man less "manly" if he uses this skill to "crochet doilies" which is a less significant job that is usually attributed to women. He will be deemed as sissy or effeminate or queen. The same skill being interpreted differently as per the absurd codes of gender make the binary codes look flimsy and illusory in Green's narration. Green discards the idea of

the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity as universal and homogenous patterns of identity. All men are not alike and not perfectly “masculine” as per these norms of gender. Green recollects his experience of witnessing “masculinity” in all its variety during the course of his involvement with the ‘Sons of Orpheus’ an all-men musical group. Green’s attribution of gender variance to a group of conventionally gendered men is a strategic turn intended to reverse the discourse of gender variance as a defect found among trans. Green normalizes gender variance by indicating that all men are not conservatively masculine. Referring to the men of ‘Sons of Orpheus’, he says,

Some were handsome, some were average, some seemed rigid or awkward while others seemed graceful, a few were recognizably gay and others appeared to be cut from the most terrifying mold of conservative straight man. Some were lean, or muscular, some were softer; some were assertive and confident, others shy or less intensely energetic. (34)

Green’s description of the heterogeneity of an all-men group, thus deconstructs the stereotypes of “true masculinity” glorified by the hegemonic discourse of gender conformism. Gender is highly subjective. Irrespective of the culturally promulgated monolithic models of masculinity and femininity, everyone has his/her distinctive mode of manifesting their gender. He challenges gender conformism by stating that “all men are not alike.” “Any man may appear feminine, androgynous, or masculine” (Green 187) but that does not make them a lesser man. Green opines that the imperative to follow the culturally mediated stereotypes of masculinity like, “men are uncommunicative”, “men are independent”, and “men like to go it alone”, prevented any sort of interaction among trans men (Green 47). This impacted the possibility of the emergence of a community of trans men to further a social movement to fight for their cause. Such stereotypes of masculinity propagated

and reinforced by heteronormativity are deconstructed by Green with his active involvement in FTM activism to unite trans men to facilitate information exchange and communication. Through his life narrative, Green encourages the members of his community to reclaim their right to define the authenticity of their gender, rather than relying on constantly shifting, arbitrary gender standards set by others. They should stop worrying about following certain prescribed standards in order to be identified as valid members of the gender of their choice (Green 144).

Janet Mock articulates a variant of womanhood that is “strong, dutiful, and outspoken” (Mock 19) against the conventional norms of weak, submissive, and fragile women. Her grandmother and aunts exhibited the resilience and resourcefulness of black womanhood. Mock thus exposes the racial prejudice of the whites who institutionalized the version of white womanhood as the universal norm and subjugated the rest as inferior. In their scheme of womanhood, black women were less refined, less sophisticated, and unruly. But Mock boldly rejected the stereotype of the white woman and followed the ideal provided by her mother and grandmother. As a child, she dreamt of becoming a “secretary” because the media projection of the stereotypes of women made it look like “a woman’s job, an attractive, efficient, hyper-feminine, submissive depiction of womanhood—a sharp contrast to the masculine world” (Mock 37). Under the influence of her mother and grandmother, Mock later understood this image of femininity as flawed and limited. She says, “I rolled my eyes at my youthful understanding of gender roles, the man in a position of power, the woman his servant” (Mock 37). These women, says Mock, played a significant role in molding Mock as a woman who defies the stereotypes. She states that these women contributed greatly to her womanhood. They made the unassuming secretary that she wanted to become look like a caricature and elevated her abilities to

be someone more powerful (Mock 65).

By refusing to abide by the norms of the ideals of femininity celebrated by the hegemonic discourses of gender binary, she develops a sense of womanhood “that came from a place of internal power and accountability of one’s own dreams as opposed to aiding man in the pursuit of his dreams” (Mock 37). The woman Mock later became was a curious blend of the conventional attributes of femininity and masculinity, “powerful... pleasure-seeking, resourceful, sexy, rhythmic, nurturing, fly, happy, stylish, rambunctious, gossipy, feeling, hurt, unapologetic woman” (Mock 66).

Simultaneously in Mock’s narrative, there is a critique of the stereotypes of women that the hegemonic patriarchal society cherished as a way of subjugating women. Just like Bornstein, Mock also rejects these ideals of femininity in favour of being truthful to who she is. Mock recalls how she practised self-denial and hatred of her body by measuring it against the “perfect woman” models projected by the media. The images of femininity she adored were the pop culture images that MTV had fed her. She said, “I had a vision board of my ideal.... I wanted Halle Berry’s or Tyra Banks’ breasts, Britney Spears’s midsection, Beyonce’s curvy silhouette and long hair, and I prayed that I wouldn’t grow any taller, so I didn’t tower over the petite Asian girls who were the barometer of beauty in the islands” (Mock 123). The discord between the “elusive ideal” of femininity and the truth of her transitioned body made her loath herself for a long time when she started to transition. It took time for Mock to understand that she “was chasing an ideal that was separate from my personal experience” (Mock 123). But once the understanding dawned on her, she stopped being critical of herself and negated the “real woman” claims of early narratives. Mock understood her womanhood as a “balancing act to express her

femininity in a world that is hostile toward it and frames femininity as an artifice and fake in opposition to masculinity which often represents realness” (Mock 124). This critique of patriarchy and a refusal to let herself be objectified by the gender-normative world is an act of reversal and protest exercised by Mock.

While the early trans women struggled hard to match the ideals of femininity glorified by the cisgender world and projected by the popular culture so as to prove themselves as “real women”, Bornstein, Mock and Talusan repudiate those biased narratives on womanhood. They are not willing to embody their womanhood as an artifice. Apart from the ideal of the female body propagated by heteronormativity, Mock also denies the archetype of the feminine self as ideal, selfless, nurturing, and sacrificing wives and mothers in her memoir. Talking about the relationship with her mother, Mock expresses her regret for judging her mother based on the standards of femininity, the stereotype of the selfless mother employed by patriarchy to subjugate women. Mock opines, “I had faulted mom for not living up to the image that I had projected onto her, the image of the perfect mother I felt she should have been for me” (Mock 240). It was this ideal of femininity that every trans woman attempted to become in the early narratives through the construction of a plausible history that would authenticate their claims to womanhood. While these early trans women portrayed their pre-transition self as the typical submissive and weak feminine one, Mock presents the reversal of the same. She states that she was the most mischievous and strong one among the siblings.

Mock reveals the kind of details about her pre-transition self that the early authors would have hidden or denied with an intent to depict their femininity as “real” and in accordance with the expectations of the culturally established codes of femininity. But Mock recollects how she dared to lit a bunch of ants on fire and

refused to cry when her father whipped her to deprive him of the satisfaction of seeing her cry (Mock 33-34). Her brother, on the other hand, used to anticipate the pain and cry before even getting whipped. For Mock, all this was an exhibition of her power (Mock 34), an aspect of gender identity that is seldom applied to women by patriarchy. At the same time Mock agrees to certain facts of her childhood like being scared of cycling, a sport conventionally categorized as belonging to boys, which her brother enjoyed. She remembers how her father bullied and punished her for being sissy and not being able to ride a bicycle like her brother. In Mock's narration, there is no filtering of memories to construct a personal history that suited the purpose of early trans life narratives. She is the least bothered of the construction of a suitable narrative to authenticate her claims to cross-gender identification to force the cisgender world's sanction of her story.

For Mock, trying every day to combat preconceived ideas and stereotypes learned from popular culture was not on her priority list. Mock says, "I was trying to survive, in addition to figuring myself out and unpacking who I was beyond the gender stuff" (248). This move beyond the "gender stuff" is indicative of the major paradigm shift that 21st-century trans life narratives took to promote a posttranssexual ideology. Mock's perception of her identity largely deviates from the concept of identity projected in early trans life narratives. For Mock identity is an intersection of various influences like family, culture, and community. Gender is just one aspect of her identity, not the sole attribute that defines Mock. Quoting James Baldwin, Mock states that, for her, identity is a loose garment that covers nakedness and at the same time one that allows one to "feel one's nakedness". For Mock, Trust in one's nakedness, the authentic inner self, "gives one the power to change one's robes" (249). Mock opines,

I am aware that identifying with what people see versus what's authentic, meaning who I actually am, involves the erasure of parts of myself, my history, my people, my experience. Living by other people's perceptions shrinks us to shells of ourselves, rather than complex people embodying multiple identities. I am a trans woman of colour, and that identity has enabled me to be truer to myself, offering me an anchor from which I can uplift my visible blackness, my often invisible trans womanhood, my little-talked-about Hawaiian heritage and the many iterations of womanhood the combine. (249)

The early trans women narrators voluntarily let themselves be judged, scrutinized, and evaluated by the cisgender society and curtailed aspects of themselves that endangered their acceptance as "real women". They lived in perpetual hatred of themselves for not being able to match the standards set by the hegemonic discourse on gender and lived a life of stealth, self-denial, and adherence to gender conservatism. But Mock overcomes this by challenging the norms of gender conformism and the prerogative of the heteronormative society to set these norms. Instead of abiding by these norms, Mock states that "no one was able to live up to that ideal because that woman did not exist" (240). Mock thus denies the very existence of an identity called "real woman" not just for trans women, but for women in general.

In the opinion of Tobia, challenging gender norms is equal to challenging everything that is oppressive. They state, "Through challenging the idea of manhood, of being 'a good man', of 'manning up', I was burrowing deep into the core of power, privilege, and hierarchy" (Tobia 163). In their typical humorous tone, Tobia negates gender binary and normalizes gender nonconformism by stating that Jesus was nonbinary and a member of trans community because "God is clearly too big, too

wise, too omnipotent to have an easily discernible binary human gender. I mean, God made all the genders, so clearly God isn't just one. God is genderless, or rather, genderful" (Tobia 312). Tobia's narrative is an outright critique of the stereotype of hyper-masculinity celebrated by contemporary culture. They question the kind of gender conditioning or masculinization that children undergo in schools and family as well as their exposure through media. Tobia detests the normalization of violence and the exertion of power over the weak glorified as marks of masculinity. They say,

In my experience, the process of being masculinized, the process of becoming a man, was based on three practices: the practice of violence, the endurance of physical pain, and the violation of consent. As a preteen, you were supposed to punch each other at random. You were supposed to point your airsoft gun at someone else and ask, "Can I shoot you?"; when they said no, you were supposed to do it anyway. You were supposed to learn to never say no, and you were supposed to punish people when they did say no. You were supposed to stigmatize and victimize weakness. (88)

Instead, Tobia preferred being a gentle and compassionate person beyond all dictates of masculinity. Tobia recalls how he struggled to cope with this process of "toughening up" "becoming men" or "just being boys" (Tobia 89) when they were a student. They also point a finger at the world of the adults who never interfered in this process of masculinization. Tobia disinterested in becoming a "man enough" through a participation in the "perpetual ritual of violence" transgressed the bound of masculinity (Tobia 90). But at the same time, they didn't want to be a woman who is "slutty,' 'inferior,' 'bad at math,' or whatever sorts of stale tropes people hold to be true these days... stereotypes that we've actually been taught about women" (Tobia 277). Tobia's gender is thus their own and refuses to conform to the codes of binary.

They practice their own brand of femininity which is “‘Smarter’, ‘Resilient’, ‘Tougher’, ‘Rugged’, ‘Stronger.’, ‘Muscular.’, ‘Athletic’, ‘Politically savvy’” (Tobia 277).

When the trans life narratives of the last century imitated the gender-specific personality attributes and behavioural patterns without reproving their bias and absurdity, the authors of the present century subject these gender stereotypes to severe scrutiny to expose the hypocrisy, domination and hidden patriarchal agenda ingrained in them. The male-to-female transsexuals of the last century, whose life narratives dominated the genre of trans life writings were the least critical of the gendered performance expected of a woman and how it aimed at the construction of a submissive being. The objectification of the female body and the resultant subjugation women confronted were blindly assimilated by them as marks of their “true” femininity. They readily became the “weak, fragile and emotional” ideal of femininity without questioning the logic behind such notions. But none of the female identified and medically transitioned trans persons chosen for the current study approve these stereotypes. The narratives offered by Green, a trans man, is a detractor of the conventions of masculinity and Tobia negates the cultural codes of both masculinity and femininity in favour of their unique gendered embodiment. Disrupting the binary perspective on gender as an essential and inherent quality, these writers replace gender conformist and transnormative life narratives of early trans authors. For all these writers, gender is an act which grows out of cultural norms. It is reinforced and reiterated by societal norms and insistence on gender conformity. Instead of repeating these norms, these authors sought to reconstruct the same and invent their subjective ways to present their gender.

Chapter IV

Becoming Trans: Body as a Site of Contestation

I'm liking more and more the person I'm still becoming.

(Bornstein, *Queer* 24)

The notion of 'becoming' is central to the narratives on body, gender, and identity formation. It is a highly constructive concept, especially in trans theorization regarding the physicality of trans embodiment. It has the potential to reformulate the conventional notions associated with body and gender identity. It replaces the idea of 'being' a man or woman with becoming one. Being in the "right gender" with "the right body" was the culturally and socially sanctioned state of subjectivity until the early decades of the 20th century. In its Greek philosophic origins, the concept of 'becoming' relates to change and movement in contrast to the fixity and stasis of 'being'. The wrong body model of trans identity propagated by the early trans life narratives portrayed their journey as one from 'being' in the wrong body to 'being' in the right body.

Trans life narratives of the 21st century adopted an ideological shift from 'being' to 'becoming'. Explaining the notion of becoming, T. Garner states that becoming is that "which provides a destabilization of being and the structures of power associated with it" that "involves movement from stable, 'molar' entity to indeterminable, 'molecular' nonidentity, extending beyond the limits of dominant corporeal and conceptual logic" (Garner 30). This chapter examines the select 21st century trans life narratives of Jamison Green, Janet Mock, Kate Bornstein, Jacob Tobia, and Meredith Talusan to explore the posttranssexual ideology evident in their treatment of the classical wrong body model of trans emergence.

The select trans life narratives of the 21st century depict a new age of trans

epistemology that rejects the wrong body model as the base of trans identity. These narratives move away from the earlier ones which treated gender as an attribute of the body and established gender identity as a personal problem to be medically treated. These authors seek alternatives to the medical model of trans identity. Instead of portraying a split self before the transition and an integrated whole after surgery, recent writings capture trans as a continuously evolving entity in defiance of heteronormativity. While some resort to medical intervention as one way to evolve, others actualize their identity in opposition to medical discourse. The earlier discourse constructed around trans subjects by the medical and media field conceived trans as people trapped in the wrong body and liberated through the medical construction of new bodies.

However, the recent emergence of life narratives authored by individuals who seldom felt the need to undergo medical transition to align their bodies with their gender preference has raised questions about the authenticity and broad relevance of earlier transgender narratives as a universal model of transgender identity construction. The authors chosen for the current study reconstitute themselves as active subjects with agency to embrace an identity viable without being subjected to the regulating principles of heteronormativity represented by surgical transformation. Some even go to the extent of experimenting with their body placing it at crossroads between the binary. They boldly reject biologism as the base of gender identity to produce counterhegemonic discourse. The transability of the conventional narratives, “one that understands the goal of transition as passing” (Arfini 229) gives way to a counterhegemonic, non-normative trans embodiment.

Though cross-gender identification was prevalent even before, it got labelled as a disorder in 1980 when it was included in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and*

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). DSM-III listed transsexualism as a psycho-sexual disorder and defined it as a “disorder characterized by the individual’s feelings of discomfort and inappropriateness about his or her anatomic sex and by persistent behaviour generally associated with the other sex.” It described gender identity as “the sense of knowing to which sex one belongs”, that is, the awareness that “I am a male” or “I am a female” and a disorder ensues when there is “an incongruence between anatomic sex and gender identity.” An individual’s ability to identify or know his anatomic sex and feel comfortable with the gender identity corresponding to that sex forms the base of normative gender identity as per DSM III. If one fails to do so, it becomes a disorder labelled as transsexualism which, according to medical discourse, is a “heterogeneous disorder”, leading to a “persistent wish to be rid of one’s genital and to live as a member of the other sex.” The use of ‘sex’ in all the definitions indicates the negation of gender identity as an individual’s innate sense of his/her subjectivity. Instead, gender identity becomes an auxiliary of one’s anatomy. DSM III also states that if a person has to be accepted as a transsexual, he/she should find their “genitals” repugnant which may lead to a persistent request for sex reassignment by surgical or hormonal means.” Within the purview of DSM-III definition, those individuals who “display the behaviour characteristics of the opposite sex but not desiring medical transition, are dismissed as instances of “effeminate homosexuality” (DSM III 261, 262).

As per the fourth edition of DSM, there are two components of Gender Identity Disorder. They are a “strong and persistent cross gender identification, which is the desire to be, or the insistence that one is of the other sex” and “a persistent discomfort about one’s assigned sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex.” It also states that people with Gender Identity Disorder will be

preoccupied with their wish to live as the member of the other sex which will be “manifested as an intense desire to adopt the social role of the other sex or to acquire the physical appearance of the other sex through hormonal or surgical manipulation” (DSM IV 532, 533). As per the definition of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Health Problems, tenth revision (ICD-10), gender identity disorder manifests as “A desire to live and be accepted as a member of the opposite sex, usually accompanied by a sense of discomfort with, or inappropriateness of, one’s anatomic sex, and a wish to have surgery and hormonal treatment to make one’s body as congruent as possible with one’s preferred sex” (168). Though DSM V replaced “gender identity disorder” with “gender dysphoria” in an attempt to depathologize trans people in 2013, it still used the wrong body notion and relocated it to the expectations of others about one’s gender and sex. To be diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria, as per DSM V, “there must be a marked difference between the individual’s expressed/ experienced gender and the gender others would assign him or her” (DSM V 451). In the complete Keywords section of TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly, the ‘wrong body’ is described as:

The wrong body is envisioned as a state in which gendered body and gender identity do not match; hence a disparity between body (materiality) and self (subjectivity) is embodied in the narrative, entertaining dichotomous disjunctions such as the body and its expression, the body and its perception, the body and surrounding gender norms, and sex and gender, which implicitly places sex with (material) genitalia and gender with its (social) expression. (Engdahl 268)

To accept oneself as a woman with a penis or a man with a vagina was thus pathological. The only way to fix this was to get rid of their external sex signifiers and

get them replaced by the genitals of the opposite sex.

According to Stone, “Under the binary phallographic founding myth by which Western bodies and subjects are authorized, only one body per gendered subject is right. All other bodies are wrong.” Stone also points out that “neither the investigators nor the transsexuals have taken the step of problematizing "wrong body" as an adequate descriptive category. In fact, "wrong body" has come, virtually by default, to define the syndrome” (297). By quoting the perspectives expressed by Anne Fausto Sterling in *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, Caterina Nirta opines that the “fixation with correcting ambiguously sexed bodies into either male or female coincides with the progressive authority acquired by medicine and biology which has deemed irregular bodies pathological” (341). A transsexual was thus expected to engage in body modification which includes hormone injection, surgery, speech therapy, and behaviour modification to match the altered body and move from one social and cultural gender role to the opposite gender role physically and mentally. One who distances from this course of action will be categorized as a cross-dresser or a transvestite and the authenticity of his/her claims to cross-gender identification will be challenged and denied. As stated by Susanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, "Genitals have turned out to be easier to change than gender identity What we have witnessed in the last 10 years is the triumph of the surgeons over the psychotherapists in the race to restore gender to an unambiguous reality” (qtd. in Shapiro 250). This discourse on transsexualism produced by medical institutions was later propagated by media and trans life narratives. But this is exclusionary, leading to the othering of those trans people who identify themselves as trans but do not intend to subject themselves to body modification or even after undergoing medical transition, refuse to hide their past as trans and pass as a

cisgender to gain membership in any one gender-sex category.

In this regard, the earlier trans memoirs, which were hailed as representatives of trans discourse, become oppressive to those who do not subscribe to the gender binary. While discussing the common narrative trope of trans memoirs in his introduction to *Sexual Metamorphosis: An Anthology of Transsexual Memoirs*, Jonathan Ames identifies a “Three-Act Model” as the prototype of trans self-narrative. It begins with a “gender-dysphoric childhood” followed by a “move to the big city and the transformation” concluded by “the aftermath of the sex change” (qtd. in Rondot 7). The final sex change focuses on the author’s sense of self-acceptance as well as a legitimized entry into the normative sphere of gender identity sanctioned by the surgically transformed body in alignment with their true gender. Aron Devor’s ‘14-stage model of transsexual development’ lists this stage as one of “Successful post-transition living” (Devor 43) where the post-surgery gender-sex identity is established and accepted as the “real” one. This is followed by the next stage of integration where the person who underwent surgery goes through a phase of identity integration and stigma management which is realized through passing or hiding. During this stage, the fact of transsexuality becomes mostly invisible (Devor 43). The medical model of transsexuality ends with this phase of passing where the trans is advised to merge and disappear within the cisgender crowd and be invisible as a trans. As per Devor’s model, the last stage (stage 14) of transsexual development is pride, one during which the post-operative trans takes pride in his/her transsexual identity and uses the same for trans advocacy. This last phase of trans advocacy and visibility make the whole process of trans identity formation political and reversive of heteronormativity. But the wrong body model proposed by medico-psychiatric institutions of the early trans discourses promoted passing. All the canonical texts

bear witness to this model.

As discussed by Sandy Stone and Bernice Hausman, the majority of the earlier trans autobiographies were closed texts which projected physiological intersexuality as the cause of their transsexualism. According to Hausman this “interpretive foreclosure” (Hausman 157) a common feature of earlier trans life narratives should be understood in relation to the medical production of transsexualism. A transgender’s success in obtaining genital reconstruction depended upon the unambiguous ways in which he/she ties his/her gender with sex. These texts propagated the belief that “all non-transsexual people experience gender as they do, only in the ‘right’ bodies.... That, there is a direct connection between the body... and human behaviour” (Hausman 158).

In her essay “Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance”, Talia Mae Bettcher explains how there were only “two stories” available for gender variant people to draw on. They were ‘the wrong body model’ that developed in the realms of medical science and the ‘beyond the binary model’ popularized by the emerging queer discourse in the 1990s. The wrong body model had two variants, the pathological variant that treated transsexuality as the problem of the body and the psychological variant that treated transsexuality as a problem of the mind. “In both versions, one is effectively a man or a woman ‘trapped in the wrong body’” (Bettcher 383) and both considered it treatable through sex reassignment surgery by medical science.

Bettcher problematizes the wrong body model by stating that it cannot fully validate the trans claim of belonging to a particular sex in its “true sense.” According to her there are a “multiplicity of features relevant to sex determination: chromosomes, genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, reproductive capacity, and so forth.”

But to call a transsexual, after genital reconstruction surgery, as one who has undergone a sex change, “we must discount other features including chromosomes” and accept genitalia as definitive of gender identity (Bettcher 386). Post-operative transsexuality is thus only analogous and thus wrong body model fails to establish its argument of a transsexual’s claim to a particular sex, which it professes to secure. According to Bettcher, a post-operative transsexual is “positioned problematically with respect to binary” and “at best, the genitally post-op trans person is admitted into the category of woman (or man) only marginally, owing to a decision to take her self-identity seriously. Besides that, she’s actually very close to the border between male and female” (386).

The second and new story that gained popularity in the 1990s’ was the new transgender politics popularized by trans activists like Sandy Stone, Leslie Feinberg and Kate Bornstein. This version subscribed to a ‘beyond the binary model’ which resisted the medical model and blamed the medical regulations of transsexuality as “one of the main ways that society tries to erase transgender people” (Bettcher 384) by forcing them into any one of the two categories of heteronormative ideology. Thinkers like Jay Prosser (1998), Henry Rubin (2003), Viviane K. Namaste (2005), and Gayle Salamon (2010) have raised serious concerns about beyond the binary model propagated by the new trans politics as they thought it ignored the reality of transsexual people who preferred to fit in conventionally within the gender binary as men or women. It treated those who refused to identify themselves as ‘beyond the binary’ as mistaken people or as “politically problematic people” since they disengage themselves from the “resistant forces of trans lives lived in opposition to the oppressive binary” (Namaste 7). Prosser blamed queer theorizations of the transsexual as per which “the transgendered subject has typically had centre stage over the

transsexual” and ignored the “bodiliness of gendered crossing” which is integral to the transsexual sense of embodiment (Prosser 6).

Bettcher lists the multifarious ways in which these concerns manifest politically. There is a very visible political conflict between the two terms used to refer to trans identities, ‘transsexual’ and ‘transgender’. ‘Transsexual’ has become politically opposed to the vision articulated by the term ‘transgender’ and they were mutually exclusive. Subsequently, categories such as genderqueer to refer to those who oppose binary and trans as a more neutral term to include both those who fall in line with binary and those who live ‘beyond the binary’ emerged. All such terms of separatism indicate “a serious disconnect between theory cited and actual practice” (Bettcher 385) and the need for a reincarnation of the trans identity.

It is here the select 21st century life narratives depart from the early ones and in the process attain the “potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries” (Stone 296). These narratives are in the process of creating a space for numerous gender variant identities by challenging the hegemonic gender structure founded on “the biological sexual body as a ‘*sin qua non*’ of gender identity and role” (Bolin 447). Anne Bolin refers to them as “transgenderist”, who are

Disquieting to the established gender system and unsettles the boundaries of bipolarity and opposition in the gender schema by suggesting a continuum of masculinity and femininity, renouncing gender as aligned with genitals, body, social status and/or role. Transgenderism reiterates what the cross-cultural record reveals; the independence of gender traits in a Western biocentric model of sex. (447-448)

Jacob Tobia's story of their trans emergence becomes one crucial point of departure from the normalizing tales that promoted the wrong body model of trans identity formation. Tobia derides the classical binary transgender story as an ice cream store that sells "only chocolate Ice cream". They agree that the classical transition story is "a transformational and deeply worthwhile story." But they critique the media culture of establishing that as the standard, universal story deeming it as more valuable than that of others. They opine that those who transition and tell their transition stories are self-actualized, powerful and beautiful, "but it is not okay for cisgender people to take that story as the trans story because that narrative simply isn't true for all of us" (Tobia 13). The transsexual identity projected by the early trans life narratives emerges as a medically constructed entity. According to Anne Bolin, "the medicalization of transsexual identity (is) a social-historical discourse reifying gender as biological." This clinically constructed transsexual identity underpinned the dichotomic nature of sex and gender "represented by the genitals, the symbols of reproductive difference (as) the primary basis for assigning biological sex" (Bolin 453).

This predominance of transition narratives forced others, who do not fit, to either adapt their stories to fit the classical one or remain silent. Tobia's account of their gender journey thus represents all those whose stories were silenced in the mainstream trans canon just because they had a different story to tell. Tobia rejects the classical story to make it possible for them to tell their story. Before proceeding to narrate their story, Tobia exposes the heterosexist agenda of the classical version of transition narratives popularized by canonical texts. Tobia delineates the narrative pattern of classical trans story like this;

I was born in the wrong body. The doctors told my parents that I was a -----

[boy/girl], but I always knew I was the opposite of that I spent years hating myself, thinking that something was wrong with me. I became more and more depressed Then one day I got the courage to come out I was rejected by many people in my life That is when I decided I needed to transition. I started hormones and had a -----[breast augmentation /reduction]. Then I did the really hard thing and got “the surgery” to make sure that my genitals aligned with my identity.... Now I’m living as a man-----[man or woman] and I couldn’t be happier I reintegrated into gender binary and “fixed the problem,” so now I am a -----[man/woman] like you.... Now I can be a normal person and live as a full part of society.... Trans people are just like you. (13)

This satirical account of the classical transition story brilliantly unveils the monolithic nature of all canonical trans life narratives. The extent to which this story homogenized trans experience and forced them to adapt to the heteronormative world is clearly conveyed by Tobia. Those who failed to reproduce this or failed to relate to this were placed outside the transnormative realm of existence. The concluding statement “trans people are just like you” (Tobia 13) sums up the heteronormative agenda of classical trans life stories which celebrated trans people getting fixed through surgery and becoming “normal”. From the wrong body narrative standpoint, being a transgender is just a temporary condition, an in-between stance before becoming a whole person, through medical transition. Instead of acknowledging gender as fluid and plural, they promoted fixed and static gender identity. To decipher the meaning of their experience within the context of available discourses on gender and biological dimorphism, the early trans autobiographers portrayed themselves as patients in need of a medical fix. On the contrary, the select 21st-century trans life

narratives challenged the medical pathologization and projected medical transition as a personal choice. These life narratives become resistant through their rejection of passing as the means to cope with the post-surgical phase of their life to normalize their subjectivities. According to Tobia, the wrong body narrative is an “*oversimplification* of the trans community” (14), a tool used by the cisgender editors, movement leaders and gatekeepers of the gender binary to force trans people to fit into one of the binary genders.

While narrating their journey of transness, Tobia explains how a better understanding of their gender made them aware of the misconceptions to which they were subjected to under the influence of classical transition stories. Tobia says, “Back then, I had such a narrow definition of what transness could be. I thought you were only trans if you wanted to change your body in a serious way. I thought being trans was a cookie-cutter, one size-fit-all identity, one that certainly didn’t seem to fit me” (162). Once Tobia comes to terms with their femininity in their male body, instead of using the cliched transition phrase of becoming woman, they say, “I left behind the one thing that had always had me back: my manhood” (245). Leaving manhood, Tobia says, did not mean leaving behind their “euphemistic manhood”, manhood /womanhood as euphemistic with vagina /penis. For Tobia, they had not changed their genitals, “but ...had left behind the idea of being a man” which was as easy as “getting rid of an ugly jacket that someone else bought for you that you never liked in the first place” (Tobia 244). For Tobia, body did not decide one’s gender. Instead, it is how one inhabits a body that decides one’s gender. Once Tobia stopped being a man in their male body, they grew comfortable being a woman in the same body.

Tobia understood the materiality of gender, associating a gender identity to an essentially visible genital as an illusion “constructed through a ritualized repetition of

norms” (Butler, *Bodies X*). Trying to fit into this constructive social frame is like wearing a jacket that someone else had bought without asking for one’s choice or preference. Thus, sex becomes “not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the “one” becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (Butler, *Bodies 2*). Tobia even rejects the cisgender society’s notions of a gender queer, one who did not medically transition as technically a male or female (275). They discard the medical model of transness by questioning the link between being “technically” in possession of a certain kind of body that mandates adherence to certain kinds of gender behaviour.

All the early trans life narratives were written by those who had access to the medical model of transgender subjectivity. They were all upper-class white men who medically transitioned and became women. Their race and social status played a major role in enabling them to attain and pronounce their transsexual identity. The absence of life narratives by trans men and by culturally and racially marginalized trans in the canon of early trans literature is indicative of the dominance of racial and patriarchal privilege in the construction of trans identity that prevailed then. Thus, the canon of early trans life narratives is exclusionary. Trans people like Mock, a “low-income trans girl of colour” (Mock 136) and Talusan, an Albino Philippino, stood racially, culturally, and economically outside the privileged realms of this medical discourse of transsexuality. For Janet Mock, these canonical celebrity transition stories are “best case scenarios” (119), “the tried-and-true transition stories tailored to the cis gaze” which seldom consider the “barriers that make it nearly impossible for trans women, specifically those of colour and those from low income communities, to lead thriving lives” and “fail at reporting on what our lives are like beyond our bodies,

hormones, surgeries, birth names and before-and-after photos” (257).

Janet Mock exposes class, and race prejudice in the canon of early trans life narratives that erase the presence of trans from poor and black communities and thus fail to represent the reality for most trans people. She says that though there are common elements in the journey of white and black women, challenging the media tropes that plug trans people into the “transition narrative “erases the nuances of race, class, and gender” (256). Her decision to deconstruct the genre of trans life narratives dominated by white trans men and women of access thus becomes a politically charged move towards gaining equal representation and participation in the process of trans identity formation.

According to Janet Mock, she was able to be true to herself about her insecurities and dilemma with the gender identity she preferred only because she was “under the examination of a sensitive endocrinologist who gave transsexual patients the medication they needed with minimal barriers. Dr. R believed in self-determination and diversity in gender and bodies which is not the norm in the medical establishment.” The “norm” she refers to here is the dictates of the medical establishment which insisted that to gain access to medical transition, the transsexual patient must be pathologized as “mentally unwell and unfit” (Mock 136). Subjecting oneself to this mandatory categorization of disorder was the only way to entitle one to the diagnosis supporting surgery and health insurance. The medical establishment enjoyed the authority to confer surgery and this conferment of surgery was based on the guidelines on gender and sex laid on the basis of biological dimorphism.

Julia Serano describes this as the “gatekeeper model of transsexuality” (115) with medicine and psychiatry holding the sceptre. In this “gatekeeper micromanagement of transition” (Serano 116), the individual’s felt sense of the self

was subjugated in favour of cultural and biological dictates on gender and forced a large number of trans people whose social and economic status made it impossible for them to afford medical transition out of the system. Mock could escape this because her doctor was sensible enough to take the person's self-determination into account regarding matters of gender. Being poor and coloured, the only option she had was to consider cheaper and easy measures to get hormonal or surgical treatment which was available outside the established system. Though it involved risk, Mock says that she "was able to operate outside the system because (she) had a physician who championed body autonomy and the idea that we should make our own decisions about our bodies" (Mock 137). This sanctioning of her subjective sense of her gender and body autonomy as valid and legit in case of medical transition was not the medical norm. Discarding the adherence to established systems of binary and thereby unsettling the system is what the life narratives of the 21st century did by questioning the very foundations of sex/gender dichotomy.

The traditional account of surgery as death and rebirth is a common trope that one sees in conventional life narratives. They enter the surgery room and reemerge as complete beings placed perfectly into one of the two categories of gender identity. What happens during and after the surgery, the physical pain one undergoes, the element of uncertainty regarding the result of the surgery, and the risk of death never found a place in earlier texts. Hormone therapy, the treatment plan introduced before the surgery to prepare the body for the procedure as well as prescribed to those who are reluctant to undergo surgery but want to change the visible features of the body, also had its repercussions. But the earlier narratives, instead of being truthful about all these uncertainties and risks, projected them as magic remedies changing one from male/female to female/male overnight. The doctors who performed these surgeries or

prescribed the hormones became magicians capable of providing a new life to the trans subjects who undergo treatment.

Janet Mock and Jamison Green talk about all these unrepresented challenges of physical transition in their memoir. Janet Mock emphasizes the fact that the hormone tablets, which in earlier narratives changed trans bodies from male/female to female/male, are not “miracle drugs” (123,135). Quite contrary to Mock’s expectations, those drugs didn’t make her a woman overnight. Unlike the earlier narratives, instead of exaggerating the desirable effects of hormone therapy, Mock begins by listing the adverse effects and then adds, as an afterthought, the statement, “There were desirable effects too” (137). This largely runs contrary to the earlier narratives. Mock lists water retention, insatiable appetite, weight gain and acne breakout as the immediate undesirable effect of taking hormones. Whereas her list of desirable effects has a few items like the suppleness of the skin, breast swelling and sensitive areolas (Mock 137-138). This is subversive of the canonical accounts of transition. Green states that “taking testosterone will not make a social female to a social male. It will only change some sex-differentiated characteristics that are interpreted socially as male, but it won’t make a man of anyone” (94). By quoting Bernice Hausman, Green states that nobody usually mentions the pain of transition surgery because the admission of pain serves “to undermine the text’s primary argument that the subject was really meant to be the sex he or she must be surgically fashioned into” (Hausman 167, Green 186). Green rejects this negation of pain favoured and practiced by early trans narrators to prove the authenticity of gender claim by stating that “the quality of being free of physical pain does not confer a greater veracity on any subject’s experience of gender” (186). He even denies surgery as the means to change sex by citing the example of Billy Tipton, who convinced

everyone of his masculinity by hiding his female body until his death. Green states that “The fact is that people do change their sex to conform their gender without hormones or surgery. It is questionable whether it is legally possible in the U.S. to do this (at the present time), but it is socially possible” (91).

From the perspective of medical transition, trans needed to remember, or in the absence of valid memories, construct a past of cross-gender identification to prove themselves as suffering from gender identity disorder. Transsexualism as a diagnostic category thus promoted gender conservatism among medical professionals as well as among trans people. Before subjecting one to surgery, doctors insisted on “close preoperative monitoring of the candidate's behaviour, attitudes, and feelings to judge how successful an applicant for surgery is likely to be at playing the desired gender role” (Shapiro 254). This insistence on a convincing and appropriate gender performance, coupled with intense hatred against the body assigned at birth, forced the prospective candidates for surgery to construct “plausible histories” (Stone 295) of their past as well as of their post-surgery phase by erasing those aspects of their identity which will jeopardize their hopes of becoming a “conventionally gendered real being.” Julia Serano exposes the hypocrisy of the gatekeepers of the sex reassignment surgery in her book *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. She opines that though the medical and psychiatric industry claimed to be interested in the well-being of transpeople, they were actually eager to protect the interest of the cissexist society’s need to safeguard the rigid gender norms. When Dr. Harry Benjamin popularized hormone replacement therapy, he had intended it to ease the gender dissonance experienced by transgender people who were not ready for a full medical transition to the other sex. But later, as transsexuality gained popularity, the media, psychiatric and medical industry, the

gatekeepers of sex reassignment surgery, felt the need to restrict and regulate the availability and use of hormone therapy to cater to the cissexist society's need to preserve the bi-gendered social structure. According to Serano, though the gatekeepers consistently claimed to protect transsexuals, they always had an underlying agenda and they clearly sought to

(1) minimize the number of transsexuals who transitioned, (2) ensure that most people who did transition would not be "gender-ambiguous" in any way, and (3) make certain that those transsexuals who fully transitioned would remain silent about their trans status. These goals were clearly disadvantageous to transsexuals, as they limited trans people's ability to obtain relief from gender dissonance and served to isolate trans people from one another, thus rendering them invisible. (Serano 88)

In this process of medical transition, transsexuals lack agency and are forced to repeat the standards set by medical professionals to materialize their gendered subjectivities. This mandate put the truth claims projected in early trans life narratives, especially the canonical ones which propagated the wrong body model, in doubt. Passing thus becomes a highly problematic process which the recent trans life narratives reverse by being visible and by being true to their feelings towards their gender preference and their physical manifestation. With regard to transsexuals, body and one's attitude and response to the transitioned body play a major role in sustaining his/her newly sanctioned entry to the cisgender category. The earlier expressed hatred and discomfort with the body assigned at birth before transition should naturally give way to body euphoria and comfort in the newly constructed body as per the conditions and treatment plan laid down by medico-psychiatric institutions to treat transsexuality. Unless and until they express this elevated level of

comfort and ease with the new body and prove themselves to belong clearly and unambiguously to any one sex and gender category, they will be viewed with suspicion and the stigma of pathologization will continue to remain.

The canonical trans life narratives were successful in constructing a “suitable retrospective biography” (Shapiro 256), especially concerning their relationship with their bodies before and after the transition. Being born in the wrong body or trapped in the wrong body were the stock phrases that formed an essential part of this suitable biography. The same can be seen in many trans autobiographers of the 21st century also. But unlike the early narratives, this does not form the focal point of their narration. Even when they admit to having felt wrong about their body, there is a foregrounding of one’s felt sense of oneself as more important than the body. While the early trans life narrator’s claims of feeling detached from the body they were born with or the gender that was assigned to them at birth as inherent and fundamental to their sense of identity before medical transition served to accentuate gender essentialism, the recent life narratives use such claims as part of strategic essentialism. As explained by Gayatri Spivak in “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography”, strategic essentialism is a positivist use of essentialism, “a temporary essentialization to further minority political rights” (205).

The uncritical and hence destructive ideals of gender essentialism of the earlier narratives are replaced by a more rational application of the same with an intent to deconstruct the same. Writers of these select 21st century trans life narratives are strategists in this regard who are “tricksters” who make “strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak 214). Their adoption of the wrong body model to describe their mind-body alignment before transition becomes mimetic in the sense in which the concept was used by Luce Irigaray. While

discussing the power of discourse and the construction of femininity in her book *This Sex which is Not One*, Irigaray defines mimicry as the initial step or the only path to be taken to destroy the discursive mechanism involved in the construction of the feminine. She says, “there is in an initial phase, perhaps only one "path," the one assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it” (76). When Green, Mock, Talusan, and Bornstein present themselves as any one of the multiple manifestations of the wrong body model, they do it, not to be complicit in this medical discourse, but to subvert it in the subsequent pages of their memoir and hence become a political strategy. “To play with mimesis is thus...to try to recover the place of ...exploitation by discourse without allowing (oneself) to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit...to ideas about (oneself)... to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible” (Irigaray 76).

The recent trans narratives become counter-hegemonic by simultaneously using the essentialist narrative of gender to validate their gender identity claims while parallelly reversing that by exposing the unattainability of post-transition gender perfection and “realness” professed by early narrators. Janet Mock refers to herself as “born in a body that didn’t match who I was” and as a girl “in a boy’s body” (184) only once towards the end of the memoir when she quotes the letter she wrote to her father after she came out as a transgender to her family and changed her name from Charles to Janet.

For Mock, her father represented the larger society with his strict gender policing and disciplinarian insistence on Mock being the boy who will grow up to be the ideal man. When Mock presents herself to be born in the wrong body, she is

finding ways to defend herself and give reasons that the heteronormative world would find justifiable within the cultural landscape that labelled gender identity as innate. This is similar to how earlier trans people who wished for surgery read Harry Benjamin's Standards of Care and repeated the same gender performance in front of their clinicians to get access to surgery. In truth, for Mock, saying that "*I always knew I was a girl* with such certainty" was to "erase all the nuances, the work, the process of self-discovery" (Mock 16). This was not a feeling that came to her normally, but one she "adopted...as a defense against the louder world, which has told me- ever since I left Mom's body in that pink hospital atop a hill in Honolulu- that my girlhood was imaginary, something made up that needed to be fixed." Mock reveals the truth that she too had a time when she was "unsure, unstable and wobbly" about her gender. This is quite revolutionary for a trans, who later underwent medical transition, to admit that she was not sure of her gender identity. The use of words like "unstable", "unsure" and "wobbly" to refer to one's gender identity would have been unimaginable for a trans of the 20th century where his/ her conviction regarding cross-gender identification formed the basis of their entry into the cisgender world. But for Janet Mock "the fact that I admit to being uncertain doesn't discount my womanhood. It adds value to it" (Mock 16).

Mock negates the early trans preoccupation with the right kind of genitalia as the mark of their gender. For Mock, the absence of a female genitalia or the presence of male genitalia did not affect her image of herself as a woman. For her it was her hair that confirmed her femininity and an actual haircut, she thought would cut the girl out of her (Mock 32). Throughout the memoir Mock projects hair as the ideal of womanhood, a part of the human body that one can grow long or cut short as per one's choice and gender preferences. Thus, it is not with the immutability of

morphological sex characteristics, but with the malleability of one's relation to one's body, she connects her gender identity.

Kate Bornstein goes a step further by embracing an androgynous identity despite being medically transitioned into a woman. She thought that she “must be a girl” when she realized that she “wasn't a boy” not because she knew what it meant to be born as a girl in the wrong body, but because there was no other alternative known to her (Bornstein, *Queer* 3). Echoing the wrong body narratives of the past, Bornstein says with certainty that she must have been born as a girl since her mother conceived her in the womb immediately after she miscarried a girl child. According to Bornstein “the previous tenant of my mom's uterus had left behind me...a girl body” (*Queer* 12). But at the same time, she confuses her readers by stating that she decided to stop living as a man because she hated her father and never wanted to become a man like her father (*Queer* XV). The two statements contradict one another and challenge the earlier notion of gender identity as innate, inborn and beyond the control of an individual. For Bornstein, she “stopped living as a man” (*Queer* XV) and decided to take on the identity of a woman. In the “Prologue” of her memoir, she says that there are people who consider her bad and perverted because she is a trans woman. But for Bornstein, she is neither a man nor a woman, nor a trans woman. She says, “I was born male and now I've got my medical and government documents that say I'm female-but I don't call myself a woman and I know I'm not a man” (*Queer* X). She proudly embraces an in-between or beyond the binary stance irrespective of the truth of her body post-surgery.

Jamison Green is of the view that the male body need not always be synonymous with masculinity and there can be female bodies that lack femininity in the conventional sense. Society's dependence on the externally visible body for

gender categorization creates complications. Instead of categorizing the trans body as the wrong body, Green extends the gender-sex misalignment to people, in general, irrespective of whether they are cis or trans. He opines that if it is the lack of the right body that gives problems to the trans, it is the persistent struggle to match the standards of masculinity/femininity expected from a male/female body that creates crisis for a cisgendered person. He says, “It is the body that gives us problems—it’s the body that we have to deal with (whether we dress it up or alter it hormonally and/or surgically) to express our deepest sense of self” (36). Green thus challenges the myth of the right gender in the right body. Green clearly states his gender politics when he says, “I did not indoctrinate myself to believe that gender conformance was the ideal; in spite of the fact that I was now gender conforming, I brought with me, into the world of men, the notion that gender variance was valid and deserving of its own integrity” (37).

Despite their innate sense of being a woman, Jacob Tobia never felt anything wrong with their body. For Tobia, this feeling of being in the wrong body is not natural or inherent as portrayed by early trans autobiographers. Instead, this feeling was imposed on them by the heteronormative society’s disapproval of trans people who deviate from ‘one body one gender’ ideology that sustained heteronormativity. Tobia says, “My natural connection to my body, my comfort in my identity, my sense of security and safety were all taken from me before my earliest memories formed” (xi). The way Tobia describes the connection between their feminine self and their male body as “natural” is in stark contrast with the deep sense of discomfort that convention expected a trans to experience. Instead of defining themselves as a woman born in the wrong body of a man, Tobia defines themselves as a “feminine boy” (xi).

Conventional narratives presented the feeling of being trapped in the wrong

body as immanent, a preexistent one with which they were born. For Tobia, this happens much later when all their attempts to manifest their feminine self through their male body was thwarted by the world around them. This made Tobia give up on the idea that they could ever feel comfortable in their body. Tobia shatters the traditional wrong body narrative by stating that, “shame about who I am or about my body did not come naturally to me. I had to learn to be ashamed of my body and my identity. And even when others insisted that I should be ashamed, I did my darnedest to ignore them and live a shame-free life” (24). Their decision to express themselves the way they felt irrespective of the incongruity that the society around them saw between their sex and gender strikes hard at the very base of heteronormativity.

The transsexual authors chosen for this study acknowledge the urge for physical transition as normal for those who identify as transsexuals but do not believe in normalizing this. Post-transition, instead of presenting themselves as cisgender, they recognize the myth of “realness” attributed to post-transition transsexuals. Green comments that from his personal experience, he could validate the transsexual claim of feeling separated from their bodies (13). But at the same time, he refuses to normalize this. He says, “Just as not all transgendered people want to change their sex, those who do, transsexual people, are not advocating that all people with gender variant characteristics should change their sex, take on a transsexual identity, or conform to stereotypical notions of gender in their new sex if they do transition” (82). Bornstein while informing her mother of her decision to transition corrects her mother who did not want to accept her son as a transsexual and believed him to be a transvestite that “transvestites want to dress up in women’s cloth Mom, I’m getting surgery so I can live as a woman that makes me a transsexual” (*Queer* 173). But later, after physical transition, instead of taking on the full-time real woman

identity as professed by conventional transsexual narratives, Bornstein declared herself to be one with no gender. She paraded an androgynous identity for which she was cursed by a few transsexuals. “Their chief complaint,” says Bornstein, was “that my *thetans have no gender* invalidated their own gender journeys to becoming real women” (*Queer* 226).

According to Mock, blurring the lines between a trans woman and a drag queen is highly problematic. She says, “Trans womanhood is not a performance or costume...A drag queen is part-time for show time, and a trans woman is all the time” (Mock 113). At the same time, Mock acknowledges the right of those who do not undergo physical transition to womanhood. For her, “it is not their genitals that dictate their womanhood.” She rejects the stereotypical transsexual model by stating that apart from surgery, there are many other paths to womanhood, “my path and my internal sense of womanhood included a vagina, and that does not negate anyone else’s experience” (Mock 188). Green, Mock, Bornstein, and Talusan, though transsexuals technically, reject the body as the carrier of gender identity. According to Mock western culture’s gender binary system is rigidly fixed between two poles and “compartmentalizing a person as either a boy or a girl based on the appearance of one’s genitalia will lead to the neglect of one’s complex life experience” (Mock 21, 22).

Jamison Green, negating the conventional trans narrative of transition as a one-way journey from one sex to the other, to be a real man/woman, comments on the unreliability of this safe destination of realness offered by transition. Green critiques the belief propagated by the wrong body model that once a person undergoes medical transition, his/her gender variance will come to a conclusion, and he/she will become the “real man/woman” they wanted to be. He says, “And so they are! But only until

someone with greater social authority or brute strength takes away their ability to self-define “(214). Instead of an entry ticket to the undisputable realm of masculinity, transition was a path towards maturity and spiritual peace (215) for Green. Transition allowed him to be at peace with the person he was becoming by accepting the truth that though he may cease to think about his transness, “it never goes away” (Green 214). Kate Bornstein proudly embraces her ambiguous gender despite having a surgically realigned body. For her, the travel of transition did not take her to a destination of fixity and certainty. Instead, she matures enough to realize that “all roads in life lead nowhere” (Bornstein, *Queer* 252).

Mock says, despite the sense of self-confidence she had in the passability of her newly acquired body, she was subjected to intolerance and oppression. The myth of erasing the trans past for the individual and for the world gets shattered when Mock says how people refused to let go of Charles even after Charles had become Janet. She says that addressing her by her old masculine name was a “sure way of putting me in place, of letting me know that no matter how much I evolved, they clung to the way things were. The past was more than a prequel; they remembered and made sure no one forgot” (Mock 194). According to Mock the journey of a trans person is not a simple passage through sexes. Instead, it is one of self-discovery that entails a lot of complications with it. It is a journey that “goes way beyond gender and genitalia. An evolution from me to closer-to-me-ness” (Mock 227). It was a journey of self-revelation, of reconciliation with herself for Mock, one at the end of which she reconciles herself with different facets of her identity, of being trans, black, Hawaiian, young and woman (Mock 258). Meredith Talusan also rejects transition as a journey to become a complete being, one with a culturally intelligible gender embodiment leading to a happier life with no regrets or return. She thought she was the happiest

and the most content after surgery. But the question of whether she was happy with the transition would yield different answers at various points after transition. Talusan answers the question stating that “I was finally satisfied with staying put because I now know there’s no such thing as the single best, the single fairest life” (233).

Instead of professing transition as a way to fixity and normalcy regarding sex and gender, these authors question the notions of fixity and provide “alternative figurations for schemes of representations” (Braidotti 2). The most decisive factor in the life of trans, as per the medical dictates of transsexuality, before and after surgery is his/her ability to convince the medical industry of the authenticity of their claims to their preferred gender identity. Successful “passing” is essential to qualify oneself for surgery and it decided the possibility of their life turning “real” as a cisgender post-surgery. Julia Serano unveils the dangerous limits to which a transsexual was forced to hide his/her transsexual status post-transition when she says,

Canonical writings on transsexuality also argued that, for transsexuals embarking on their transition, a ‘change in geographic location is almost mandatory’, and that ‘continued association with an employer...should be terminated as to avoid any embarrassment to the employer.’ Regarding family, gatekeepers, suggested, ‘young children are better told that their parents are divorcing and that Daddy will be living far away and probably unable to see them.’ At every turn, the gatekeepers prioritized their concern for the feeling of cissexual who were related to, or acquainted with, that transsexual over those of the trans person. (91)

The emphasis on “passing” ensured that those who transition will abide by and follow the cissexist society’s prejudices about the preferred shape and size of female and male bodies as well as its insistence on heterosexual orientation and gender

expression (Serano 89). Within the community of trans, to be able to pass, to be able to present oneself as belonging to a particular gender category, both physically and mentally, was considered to be a blessing and this thought was propagated by the early trans life narratives. Most of the early trans life narratives were divided into two parts separated in the middle by a set of photographs from the childhood days to post-surgery tracing the physical evolution of the person from one sex category to which he/she was born to the transition to the other sex category. These before and after photos which religiously appeared in every canonical trans life narrative projected physical change as a testimony to the authenticity of their gender claims. The after-transition photos which projected the feminine/masculine features of the transitioned body, at times to the extent of exaggeration, silently spoke to ensure the trans membership in the cisgender society. The 21st century trans life narratives chosen for the present study take an ideological shift in this regard. Their texts do not project such a dramatic change and avoid using before and after photos to establish their authenticity. This indicates the paradigm shift that contemporary trans life narratives took by distancing themselves from using the body to further their claims to their gender identity. Jamison Green, Janet Mock, and Kate Bornstein use one photograph of themselves posing confidently in their preferred gender identity in their post-transitioned bodies on the cover page. The total absence of before photos is indicative of their disengagement with their body as the container of their gender identity. They refused to use the stereotypically sexed and gendered body to substantiate their gender subjectivity. Meredith Talusan and Jacob Tobia completely refrained from using their photos in their narratives, thus negating the body as the material evidence of one's gender identity. All these authors show an inherent disagreement with the canonical transition narratives which would earn them "visibility but fail at reporting on what

our lives are like beyond our bodies, hormones, surgeries, birth names and before-and-after photos” (Mock 256).

Sandy Stone while critiquing passing as essentialist, says that in order to constitute “transsexuals as a set of embodied texts” with the “potential for productive disruption of” heteronormativity, “the genre of visible transsexuals must grow by recruiting members from the class of invisible ones, from those who have disappeared into their “plausible histories” (296). Stone further complicates the process of passing by stating the fact that most transsexuals undergo reassignment in their thirties or forties. Thus, once they are reborn into their new bodies as the rightly sexed beings when they pass, they are erasing a large part of their life lived as a trans person to gain “normalcy”. Passing forces a transsexual to cut off his/her ties with family and friends thus leading to a lack of social support. They are compelled to live with a perpetual sense of self-hatred in closets, looking for a new job, a new geographical location to settle and a source of income to pay the therapy and medical bills. According to Julia Serano, this insistence of the medical industry on passing post-transition made many transsexuals feel depressed or suicidal post-transition (92). Thus, passing in effect amounts to self-negation which “forecloses the possibility of a life grounded in the intertextual possibilities of the transsexual body” (Stone 297). But none of these struggles found expression in early trans life writings. This deliberate exclusion of the hazards of transition in those texts made the authors of early life narratives not different in intention from the gatekeepers of transsexuality. They “saw themselves as “treating” trans people, while their insistence that trans people “pass” as cissexual and hide their trans status after transitioning only enables societal cissexism” (Serano 92).

Sandy Stone’s essay advocating trans visibility, however, did not explain the nature and extent of this visibility. Being visible as a trans in all personal and social

interactions in a transphobic culture has its perils. Passing is mostly adopted as the best possible means to deal with transness because it offers much-needed social security. Jamison Greens and Janet Mock agree on this aspect of passing in their memoirs. But at the same time, they are not ready to vanish as cisgender to ensure their privacy and security. For Green visibility is not about being always loud about one's transness. He says,

I realized that if I could live in a way that declared my own self -acceptance- that is, not to broadcast my history every minute of the day, but to speak up honestly when it was appropriate, not necessarily with anger or even impatience, but with the compassion that I was finding within myself, to dispel myths and stereotypes that people cling to us-that it would show others they could do it too. Together we could change the condition that generated our fears. (Green 68)

According to Bornstein “enforced passing is a joyless activity.” Passing, she says, “Denied the opportunity to speak our stories” and she asserts that “I need my male past as a reference point in my life” (*Gender Outlaw* 217). For Bornstein, becoming visible was the way to normalcy. She comments, “I was an out transsexual in the city. I was writing articles from a tranny point of view. People recognized me in the street as transsexual. It had been such a relief for me when I could stop pretending to be a man. Well, it was similar relief not to have to pretend I was a woman” (*Queer* 199). For Bornstein passing and presenting herself as a woman post-transition involved pretension. She describes passing as “an outward manifestation of shame and capitulation” imposed on a transsexual by the cultural imperative to belong to any one specific gender (*Gender Outlaw* 125). It was being visible that allowed her to be who she really was. The earlier transsexual claims of transition bringing out their true

self as real man/woman gets shattered here. In *Gender Outlaw* Bornstein offered an interesting reversal of the notion of passing. Instead of reserving the process of passing to transsexuals, she offers a more universal definition of passing as “the act of appearing in the gender of one’s choice. Everyone is passing; some have an easier job of it than others” (Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw* 125).

Janet Mock introduces her memoir *Redefining Realness* as her attempt to be loud about those aspects of her identity that she silenced every day gathering the dust of shame. Mock says, “It is through my personal decision to be visible that I finally see myself. There is nothing more powerful than truly being and loving yourself” (xviii). Janet Mock describes the experience of coming out as a trans as taxing and oppressive despite the advantage of having a body that could easily pass for that of a “desirable woman: young, attractive *and cis*.” Even when she was presumed as a cis woman, she was subjected to “pervasive sexist and racist objectification” in the U.S. where white women’s bodies and experiences were valued over that of women of colour (Mock 236). Mock recalls how the society around her would throw harsh words at her body which referred not just to her gender identity, but also to her racial identity. According to her, the presence of the word “sissy” in her life, “one of the first epithets thrown at her” made it easy for her to prepare herself to be indifferent to the later epithets given to her like “*freak, faggot to nigger and tranny*” (Mock 31). The juxtaposition of the words, for instance, “tranny” and “nigger” sheds light on the tragic truth of her life being a transgender of colour in a white cisgender-dominated world. Hence, being open about her transness becomes much more complicated and dangerous for Mock. She had a body that was conventionally feminine even before transition with which she could have easily passed for a cisgender. She remembers how she was looked at with admiration and jealousy by the other trans women for

being a “fish”, one who embodied the kind of ideal physical femininity. She mirrored the notion of “realness” in the sense it was used by trans people, “the ability to be seen as heteronormative.... A pathway to survival” (Mock 116). Later when she started her hormonal therapy, as Mock’s body started evolving, she further understood how heteronormative society privileges a beautiful body in alignment with gender identity. She says, though she was the same person, people were suddenly “kinder, enamoured by my apparent beauty” (156). This passability of her body and the better treatment she received from society in her passable body made her choose the path of passing as a teen. She remembers how she had started detaching herself from the community of trans people to avoid the “risk of being read as trans” (Mock 156). Like Green, Mock also states that the decision to make visible one’s transness should be left to individual discretion. But at the same time, she doesn’t promote passing when it goes to the extent of betrayal of the self as well as of the gender politics she represents. She severs the earlier association made between passing as ease of life by those who promoted passing. Instead, she asks all, especially post-transition trans to “recognize the fact that cis people are not more valuable or legitimate and that trans people who blend as cis are not more valuable or legitimate. We must recognize, discuss and dismantle this hierarchy that polices bodies and values certain ones over the others” (Mock 237).

For Janet Mock her perfectly passable body did not relieve her of the conflicts of living as a trans woman. Though she owned a body that fits “society’s narrow standards of female appearance” (Mock 154), she was judged as “fake” (Mock 155) by the cisgender majority. Her body initially helped her validate her dreams and ease her mom’s anxiety. But the cisgender society refused to sanction her female identity not because she lacked a stereotypical female body, but because she was a trans

woman and hence not a “real woman” (Mock 155). According to Mock, a trans woman knowing herself as a woman and operating in the world as a woman is not passing, “she is merely being” (155). Mock here explodes the transgender community’s belief that a passable body will ensure them a legitimate entry to the cisgender majority. This faith made most of them prefer early medical transition of their body before puberty to achieve a passable body based on the belief that it will accord them their preferred gender attribution from the cisgender society. Within the community of trans, having a “real and genuine female body” was considered to be a blessing and this thought was propagated by early trans life narratives. But Mock boldly takes an ideological shift in this regard. Instead of embracing passing which would have been easier for her with her perfectly feminine body, she chose to be true to herself and her transness.

Meredith Talusan recalls a decade of her passing as a woman post-transition as one of suffocation. For her, revealing her trans status was one that liberated her from her internalized shame (Talusan 129). Talusan says, “I couldn’t help feeling that withholding my history not only implied I was ashamed of it but also sacrificed too much of myself and my life” (217). After her initial fascination with being white, American and a woman, Talusan understood that all these identities are nothing but constructed illusions. According to Talusan she transitioned to a woman because she “wanted other people to perceive my qualities through the lens of that gender.” She reinterpreted her albinism as white skin because she associated white skin with all such privileges as wealth, education, and a better life. But later she regretted her decision because she understood the illusory nature of gender and refers to the reassignment surgery as a “huge sacrifice.” Talusan openly states that “Had I lived in a world where men were allowed to dress and behave like women without being

scorned or punished, I wouldn't have needed to be a woman at all" (Talusán 130). Green rejects Talusán argument of trans "categorically refusing body altering" had they been blessed with an ideal world that allows sex-gender incongruity as "utopian conjecture" based on "incorrigible propositions" (Green 192). He conceives of gender as a "physical trait that people use to gain or distribute power" (193). But at the same time, Green agrees that there is no single means to embrace transness. Some prefer transition, some do not. Green opines that instead of trying to regulate gender behaviour or insist on sex-gender conformity, "opening up to acknowledge and accept the variety of gender/ body combinations that exist allows more people to fully experience their gendered and sexual values" (Green 196).

The theoretical binary within which transness has been discussed posited transsexual as either literalizing the sex-gender binary or as deliteralizing this binary. According to Prosser "When figured as literalizing gender and sexuality, the transsexual is condemned for reinscribing as referential the primary categories of ontology and the natural that poststructuralism seeks to deconstruct" (13). He quotes the observations made by Carole-Anne Tyler, Catherine Millot, Marjorie Garber, and June L. Reich in this regard. According to Reich, transsexuality "works to stabilize the old sex/gender system by insisting on the dominant correspondence between gender, desire, and biological sex" (qtd. in Prosser 14). At the same time transsexual has been read antithetically as "deliteralizing the gendered body" (Prosser 14). In this regard, transsexual is glorified for pushing the sex-gender binary to the background. Quoting Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, Arthur and Marilouise Kroke and Jack Halberstam, Prosser states that in this transsexual as deliteralizing binary "the transsexual is the apogee of postmodern identity, transition illustrating that the sex/gender system is a fiction" (14). In this regard, by extension we all become

transsexuals. But this reading based on literalizing/ deliteralizing binary is confounding to trans people. Prosser states,

In readings that embrace the transsexual as deliteralizing as much as those that condemn the transsexual as literalizing, the referential transsexual subject can frighteningly disappear in his/her very invocation. Like the materiality of the body, the transsexual is the very blind spot of these writings on transsexuality. Juxtaposing both sets of readings, it becomes clear that neatly superimposed on the literalizing/deliteralizing binary is another binary, that of the reinscriptive versus the transgressive. (15)

Thus, the discourse, which intended to profess diversity and deconstruction of binary, stoops to become one promoting another binary which “encodes all literalizing as hegemonic ("bad") and all deliteralizing as subversive ("good")” (Prosser 15). Contemporary trans life narratives detach themselves from this validation of one form of transness over the other. Green and Mock embraced transition to actualize their gendered embodiment. But repeatedly states that there is no one ideal form of transness. Bornstein and Talusan, though transsexuals technically, embrace a gender expression that is more epicene than being feminine. Bornstein repositioned “transsexual” from the realms of medical transition with her political redefinition of transsexual as “anyone who admits it. . . . Anyone whose performance of gender calls into question the construct of gender itself” (*Gender Outlaw* 121). For Tobia, though transition was never an option in their journey to their gender realization, the experience of those who transitioned is equally real and beautiful. By promoting visibility and prudence in visibility, all these authors use transition to challenge and subvert the sex-gender binary. All the authors chosen, irrespective of their transsexual-transgender-gender queer identity labels disengage themselves from the

claims of realness promised by the medico-psychiatric institutions and propagated by the early trans narratives.

21st century trans life narratives resist biologism and the medical gaze by reclaiming their agency. Some depathologize themselves by resisting medical transition and proudly inhabiting the in-between space. Others while subjecting themselves to the “medical model’s normalizing gaze, still subvert the gaze back onto itself by illuminating the contradictions within “an institution that relies on fixing trans bodies that are not biologically discarded” (Rondot 9). In canonical transition narratives, gender dysphoria experienced by trans persons are shown to go hand in hand with a sense of body dysmorphia. They are intensely unhappy with their body image and desperately long to change their body to align their body with the image they have about their body in their mind. For them, body modification becomes the most important step taken towards self-acceptance. A right and real body with the right genital and rightly carved muscles or contours become a pre-requisite for all of them to accept themselves in this preferred gender identity. This dissatisfaction with one’s body image is yet another central narrative trope of all canonical trans life narratives. One mandatory episode in all transition narratives is the mirror scene in which the person experiences disgust and hatred towards his/her body image making it further problematic for him/her to feel at home in that body. All such texts promoted the idea of “coming home” to the right body, after the surgery where they feel a sense of being at home with their gender identity in their new bodies.

Surgical affirmation of gender through transitioning to the right body image is projected as crucial for their self-affirmation of gender more than their need for gaining social and legal affirmation. In other words, they change their body because they can accept themselves in their felt gender identity only in the presence of a

rightly sexed body. On the contrary, for the contemporary trans life narrators, feeling detached from their bodies is not as intense an experience. Instead, many reverse the canonical mirror image by describing how they fell in love with or admired the body they were born with. Their experience differs largely from that of the early writers as they placed their innate sense of their gender over their bodies. The body is not prioritized as the medium through which they affirm their gender identity. The body ceases to be the vehicle to carry their gender identity for them. Even those who medically transitioned did that for social acceptance, to lessen the risk of being attacked or murdered on being exposed of the truth of their body.

For writers like Tobia, the indeterminacy of their body, their refusal to discipline the body into a predictable category of either a male or female in relation to their gender identity is a way to challenge the ideal of the gendered self as a “rightly embodied one. For those who transitioned, the act of being open about their transition becomes the point of resistance whereby they question the stability of gender sex categories. Instead of becoming essentialist, it becomes reversive. When Green speaks about how he was always understood by others as a man even before his medical transition, he negates the power of the body to convey fixed meanings. Transition for the early writers was a way to being a man/ woman in its indisputable conventional modes. But for the writers of the 21st century, rather than ‘being’, the process of ‘becoming’ gains centrality.

The recent trans life narratives selected for the present study take an ideological shift in their approach towards the body. The projected sense of body hatred leading to an immediate urge to change that body to fit their gender preference is replaced by a rejection of the body as the gender signifier. In the canonical narrative frame, genitals become essential for gender identification. The most popular

narrative trope, the mirror scene, used by all canonical writers to convey the split they experienced between their body image and the image of their body gets reversed in interesting ways in the select 21st century narratives. By quoting the mirror scene from Jan Morris, Jay Prosser opines, “mirror scene is memorable for graphically figuring the specific split of the transsexual subject and prefiguring the passage or to use the appropriate term, the transition-that heals this split” (99). All the canonical texts have this scene where the person looks at the mirror before transition and sees the image of his real body getting reflected which is drastically different from the body image that the person has about his body. This intensifies his hatred against his body and his urge for transition. The person is never at peace with the mirror image that he sees before transition. But post-transition, the same mirror scene is repeated but with a dramatically opposite impact. The transitioned body that one sees in mirror becomes the ideal reflection that he longed to see, the body image that he had about himself and the image of the body match. Prosser states,

mirror scenes punctuate transsexual autobiographies with remarkable consistency. Almost to the degree of the expected surgery scenes, mirror scenes, we might say, constitute a convention of transsexual autobiography. They recur across the texts in strikingly similar fashion. A trope of transsexual representation, the split of the mirror captures the definitive splitting of the transsexual subject, freezes it, frames it schematically in narrative. The difference between gender and sex is conveyed in the difference between body image (projected self) and the image of the body (reflected self). For the transsexual the mirror initially reflects not-me: it distorts who I know myself to be. (100)

The mirror image that one sees before transition leads to disidentification.

Instead of a “jubilant integration of body” the mirror reflects an “anguishing shattering of the felt already formed imaginary body” (Prosser 100). It is this split that sets the transsexual plot of transition in motion. Once the “material body is seen not to be the felt body”, the trans subject initiates his/her journey of transition so as to assemble the “parts to be amputated and relocated surgically in order that subject may be corporeally integrated” (Prosser 100). Hence the post- surgery mirror scene projects an integrated subject; “a singly sexed autobiographical subject, an integral "I” (Prosser100). According to Prosser “In their formality, in their function as figures of self-reflection, mirror scenes serve to elucidate this formalization of transsexuality as a plot” (Prosser 101).

But recent narratives do not promote this trope of body hatred. They brilliantly reverse the pre-transition, and post-transition mirror scenes to register their anti-essentialist gender ideology. Tobia and Talusan felt at home in the bodies they were born with. Instead of reflecting a split self, for them, the mirror image corresponded to the body image they had in their mind. Tobia, though never felt any detachment between their body and gender, societal pressure to conform forced him to give up on the idea that he could ever feel comfortable in his body or look at his reflection in the mirror (Tobia 6). As per the conventional trans stories, one’s body and the sex one is assigned at birth are “poised as the enemy, as the dragon that must be slayed, as the ring that must be hurled into Mount Doom, as He Who Must Not be Named. At the end of the story, you have overcome your body to truly fit into the gender binary again” (Tobia 15).

Tobia reverses the conventional mirror scene by stating how they felt content with their feminine spirit in their masculine body that the mirror reflected. Tobia’s body with muscles and their face with a full beard didn’t restrain them from seeing

their feminine spirit getting reflected in the mirror. The conventional split between the body image and the image of the body thus gets blurred in Tobia's narration of their trans story. Tobia says, in spite of their body looking the most masculine it ever looked, "in spite of my beard and some new muscles, I'd never been more at peace with my body, my gender, or my feminine spirit" (183). Their bearded and muscular body reflecting their feminine spirit is quite in contrast to the conventional trans experience for whom the normatively sexed body was the pre-requisite for reflecting their preferred gender. For Tobia, the reflection looking back at them was "startling, yet sublimely beautiful" (199). He adorned his masculine body with bright red lipstick and the glitteriest nail polish and looked in the mirror. Tobia says, "Looking back at me in that mirror, I saw something I could never unsee, an image that would both support me and haunt me in the years to come; I saw myself. Truly and deeply, I saw myself" (199). Instead of promoting and projecting the split self, Tobia subverts the canonical mirror scene to fit their purpose.

Talusan also follows the same line of narration though she did transition physically. For Talusan, before transition, whenever she looked in the mirror, in girls' clothes and make up she saw a "woman's face" (15). For Talusan, the features of her body, albinism, and the absence of conventional masculine attributes, were blessings in disguise. This allowed her to see and present herself as a white American woman which nobody easily found out. Whenever she presented herself as a woman in her male body, people complimented her for being a "real beautiful woman" (Talusan 23). Her body, even before transition, functioned in ways to project her felt femininity. Thus, for Talusan her racial and gender identity becomes equally malleable and transferable to fit her vision of herself. In her narration, her male body becomes the comfortable carrier of her feminine gender. Post-surgery, instead of

forgetting or hiding the trans past or the body she was born with, which was custom in canonical narratives, Talusan purposefully recalls her old male face to prove to herself that it will not shake her confidence in her womanhood. But she also recalls how, even when she was in possession of the male face, the mirror always reflected a woman's face to her with no split between the real face and the female face that she imagined herself to have. Though she attributes this feeling to her weak eyesight, it reverses the canonical trans narrative trope of one being unhappy with one's body. Post-transition, she looks at the mirror to see her male face again since, for her, even now, she "by extension was a man" (Talusán 15). For her, the life she lived was always different from the truth of her identity, living as a White American, instead of as a Filipino Albino, or living as a woman, when she had a male body. Quite ironically, she says she could make the majority to believe the life she lived as real (Talusán 14). For her, there is no single truth with respect to one's gender or identity. She opines: "There is no single, objective truth...reality is so much more malleable than people make it to be, that the first step in making something real is believing that it could be real" (15). When the early transsexual people waited for a real body to substantiate the truth of their gender identity claims, for Talusán it is based on what one truly feels oneself to be that imparts reality to something (Talusán 15).

Talusán, in one of the monologues she performed before her transition projected her body as one that can perform either as a male or a female or as neither. She dismisses her genitalia as her gender signifier. She used a chrome vibrator to show "how technology can augment our body's destiny" (Talusán 155). She thus rejects the 'body is destiny' dictum of conventional trans narratives. In the course of her performance, she narrated how her body, and the self that came with it, was so different from other bodies,

especially after I realized that I could easily be perceived as a woman if I didn't have a penis, and more than that, I grew not to care whether I was a man or a woman, that I could be both or neither. But having been born with a penis, I imagined my rectum as my substitute vagina, a body part that gave me access to some of the womanhood I did not experience in my daily life. It's through this creativity that I combatted the embedded inequalities between men and women. (Talusán 155)

Talusán replaces the persistent desire to change sex, an important symptom of transsexualism as prescribed by medical institutions, with an ease of living as a woman in a male body. She says, she grew "accustomed to being in between" (180). Later, she started longing for a vagina when she longed for intimate relations with men who misunderstood her for a woman. But this longing too was not a stable one. She narrates instances of her fluctuating from this desire and more than once deciding against a physical transition. But finally, when she decided to undergo surgery, she insistently argued against the procedure of therapy that needed the client to be established as mentally ill to gain access to surgery. She says, "I reminded this therapist that mainstream mental health professionals had also treated homosexuality as a disease until at least the 70s, that I had no prior history of mental illness, that denying me hormones amounted to saying that I was incapable of making sound decisions about my own body" (218). Talusán also critiques the medical institutions' insistence on assessing the truth of a person's claims to his/her felt sense of gender based on his/her ability to convince the same using their appearance. Talusán's doctor attested that she "appeared to be an attractive woman," and according to Talusán, "without my impressive performance as my new gender, without the face and body that mimicked a blond, white woman's, I could very well have been denied the right

to choose the future of that body, regardless of my state of mind” (Talusán 218).

Unlike the conventional trans stories that talk about an immediate sense of contentment and euphoria experienced after starting hormones, Talusan says, she continued to feel uncertain about her decision. Talusan comments,

But in the months after I started taking hormones, I also had to wrestle with whether I wanted to have reassignment surgery, which felt drastic not because of the specific procedure but simply the prospect of a major operation, to change a body part I didn't have significant psychological issues with. (218)

Talusán's transition, thus is necessitated not by her sense of body dysphoria, but by the need to gain acceptance, socially and legally, as a woman. She never felt gender dysphoric being a woman in a male body. For Talusan, neither did she hate her penis (which was mandatory for a male-to-female transsexual as per the conventional story) nor was her mental health compromised (Talusán 224). She subjected herself to reassignment surgery “just to appease others.” Though this decision felt like surrender, the societal pressure to conform was too strong that “there were times when surrender felt like the right thing to do” (Talusán 218). Through the rejection of the notion of body dysphoria glorified by the early trans life narratives, Talusan reverses the biological essentialism that characterized the early narratives. She says,

It was clear to me that my concerns about my body didn't stem from some paralyzing dysphoria that only surgery could fix, but from the simple reality that my genitals were the main reason why other people judged me unacceptable and why the government refused to fully acknowledge my womanhood. (224)

Post-surgery, instead of experiencing the conventionally expected gender euphoria, Talusan felt the whole process of transition was pointless. She states,

I wondered why becoming a woman had seemed so urgent then, when it felt so mundane now, as I realized that being a woman was less important to me than having experienced being a woman, that I'd grown much less precious about how people gendered me, even though I still felt alienated from the toxic parts of manhood. (Talusán 230)

After the transition, Talusán embraced an androgynous appearance. She admits that transition did not bring any drastic change to her (Talusán 12). She matures from being in the urge to conform externally to being indifferent to normative sex-gender presentations. Her belief in her own womanhood made her confident enough to disregard the need for her body and her appearance to conform to societal expectations regarding gender. She says, "I grew wary of the need to conform to the world's expectations of me. So, the heels came off, then the make-up, then the girly clothes, until I was left presenting myself in much the same way I did before transition, except hormones had given me breasts that allowed people to identify me as female" (13).

Green's memoir also reverses the immediate urge for transition portrayed by conventional narratives. For Green, "It isn't undergoing sex reassignment that makes someone a "real transsexual" (91). He remembers how he was against the idea of medical transition initially. He cites his internalized transphobia that made him think of trans as incomplete, society's attitude towards transsexuals and the haunting question "what responsibility would I have for maintaining or deconstructing traditional gender roles once I transitioned?" (Green 23) as preventing him from taking the decision to transition. Initially, his opinion about sex change was that "only crazy people do that" and he was adamant that he had "no intention of changing (his)body." He decided against undergoing reassignment to gain others' respect

(Green 18). Later, when he decided to undergo transition, instead of prioritizing his sex as the carrier of his gender, he defines transition as “permitting (his) gender to override (his) originally assigned sex as the determinant of (his) social reality” (Green 29). After surgery, when conventional narratives portrayed life becoming easier with a correctly aligned body, Green talks about the physical changes and the social adjustments necessitated by the surgery as challenging (Green 31). Instead of projecting the post-transition body as a symbol of liberation, Green says, “Now that I had a male body, I realized it was that very body that was placing new constraints on me” (35). He even states that quite contrary to the conventional idea of the post-transition body becoming the perfect home for one’s preferred gender, for some, their transness remains invisible to others until they begin their physical transition. “It is transition that makes some trans people appear unusual” (Green 38).

In Green’s case, his silence about his transness post-transition intensified the dichotomy between his experience of himself and other people’s assumptions about him. This dichotomy made it difficult for him to embrace his manhood in his transitioned but still different body (Green 38). Rejecting the criticism that transsexual people reiterate binary, Green states that, unlike the conventionally propagated stories of transsexualism, trans people, because of their gender variance, continue to remain non-normative male/female before and after surgery. When conventional narratives claimed “realness” post-surgery, Green says, “most of us are not seeking perfection when measured against external stereotypes; rather, most of us are seeking an internal sense of comfort when measured against our own sense of ourselves” (Green 90). He accepts that even post transition, transsexuals, “acquire or retain physical difference from other men or women in the process” (Green 90). Green thus boldly rejects the purpose of transition as becoming the real man/woman after surgery. He denounces

the conventional narrative's glorification of transition as a magic remedy to gender variance. Green says, "understanding the surgery one is seeking requires accepting the fact that one is altering his body and that he will never have the body with which he should have been born. This means accepting the limitations that this body has before he gets on the operating table and accepting that he will not come out of this scarless, without wounds, or without compromises" (Green 114).

Green's experience of looking at his transitioned body after surgery varies largely from the conventional narratives. The perfect, beautiful post-transition body that the early trans life narrative projected gets replaced by one that is "flat, compressed, shriveled" (Green 115). Instead of the neatly reassigned body with identifiable genitalia, Green says, "I didn't see a penis, but I didn't see a vulva either.... I wasn't sure what I was seeing" (115). Instead of the total bliss reportedly experienced by these early life narrators, Green was scared and frightened after surgery thinking that he "would never walk again, let alone ride a horse or bicycle" (Green 115). He shatters the promised heaven of sex-gender congruence post-surgery by stating that there are two chances for the transitioned trans. They become "either the justification for the treatment by embodying the successful application of "normal" standards or we become victims of the treatment, depending on our circumstances" (Green 183). The first possibility is the only one popularized by early narratives. Green exposes the heteronormative bias of such narratives that never truthfully presented the other possibility of surgery producing victims of the process that offered a "cultural fantasy of stable identity" (Green 185). The chapter of his memoir titled "Body of Knowledge" is quite unique and innovative as it familiarizes the prospective trans person who would like to undergo transition with the exact process of surgery and Hormone Replacement Therapy. It brings people closer to the

truth of surgery including the types available and the expected expense thus demystifying the hitherto exaggerated and glorified narratives of body transition.

Kate Bornstein begins her memoir on a satirical note by stating that she was not the first transsexual in her family. If having the external features of the other sex is symptomatic of transsexualism, she says that her father Paul Bornstein was a transsexual since he had “breasts”. She says, “I’m not saying that there was anything effeminate about Paul Bornstein. Au contraire. But I have been privy to two facts of his life that marred his otherwise flawless manliness: my father had never been bar mitzvahed...and my father had breasts” (*Queer* 15). If one’s anatomy decides one’s gender identity, then her father, despite of his perfect manliness, should have been a woman as per the conventional sex-gender binary. She thus questions the rationale of placing gender identity on an individual’s body. She too negates the mandatory urge for physical transition which, according to the medical discourse, authenticates the transsexual claim to transness. According to Bornstein, the hatred of the genital one is born with, a concept normalized by the medical discourse on transsexuality is not universal. She says:

People think they have to hate their genitals in order to be transsexual. Well, some transsexuals do hate their genitals, and they act to change them. But I think that transsexuals probably do not "naturally" hate their birth-given genitals—I've not seen any evidence of that. We don't hate any part of our bodies we weren't taught to hate. We're taught to hate parts of our bodies that aren't "natural"—like a penis on a woman, or a vagina on a man—and it seems that the arbiters of nature are the doctors. (*Gender Outlaw* 119)

Instead, Bornstein expresses her fear of the uncertain as she approached surgery. She says, “I was too afraid to move in my transition to a girl” (*Queer* 159).

She accepted transition as her only direction in life but “the freak factor of which still terrified” (Bornstein, *Queer* 165) her. This fear of the uncertain as one approaches surgery was never represented in canonical life narratives. For all those writers, surgery was the assured way out from transsexualism. Under the influence of the “heterosexist mainstream transsexual narratives” (Bornstein, *Queer* 168), Bornstein also wanted to be the pretty American woman post-surgery. But under the feminist perspective of Mary, a butch woman from Philadelphia, Bornstein says she understood the absurdity of the misogynist American dream. After the first plastic surgery that Bornstein subjected herself to, she says, “I was not pretty the day the bandages came off” (*Queer* 169). But even when proceeding with surgery, Bornstein wanted the surgeon to make sure that he performs it in such a way that her face fits in with both the masculine and the feminine appearance. She says “If I go ahead with a sex change, I want to be able to look like a woman. If I decide not to at the last minute, I’ll wanna look like a man” (*Queer* 169). This indecisiveness and the possibility of going back to the previous body is in contrast to the conventional narrative trope of surgery as the “one-way ticket” to a new life of gender euphoria. After the surgery, instead of emerging as the pretty woman, Bornstein saw herself as androgynous. She felt unhappy with the body she received post-surgery. She describes herself as “ugly beyond any words that could describe (her) ugliness” (*Queer* 170). She was expecting that the surgery would help her achieve the ideals of femininity projected in the airbrushed photographs of *Playboy*, *Elle* and *Vogue*. But all that she could see was “a fat, middle-aged man in a dress at crossroads marked *Woman*” (Bornstein, *Queer* 183). By calling herself a “failure at woman” post-transition (*Queer* 184) Bornstein invalidates the previous claims to realness made by her predecessors. She had thought of becoming a real woman post-transition, but what

she became was “a transsexual in a sea of real women” (Bornstein, *Queer* 191). All this made her say “I wasn’t really all that sure I was a woman” (*Queer* 191-92). Rejecting the conventional transsexual claim to “realness”, Bornstein “feeling intimidated by the women’s comfort in their bodies” learned how to enjoy (her) voluptuous tranny body” (Bornstein, *Queer* 195). Post transition whenever she looked in the mirror, she saw herself as a “man in a dress” or a “boy looking hot in girl clothes” (Bornstein, *Queer* 240, 244).

Janet Mock speaks about her sense of detachment from her body especially during and after puberty, her persistent urge to undergo transition and her journey to Thailand for surgery as her “ticket to freedom” (192). She does echo the canonical transition narrative in this regard. But by rejecting the post-transition claims to realness, Mock also shatters transition as the pathway to “normalcy” popularized by early writers. For Mock, a transsexual being praised for looking real is a reminder of his or her transness. She says that all such compliments were “backhanded compliments, acknowledging my beauty while also invalidating my identity as a woman. To this day, I’m told in subtle and obvious ways that I am not “real”, meaning that I am not, nor will I ever be a cis woman; therefore, I am fake” (155). Mock exposes the heterosexist agenda of the medical establishment that prompts trans people to undergo surgery to become real in a society that never allows a trans person entry to the cisgender world in spite of him or her having a rightly sexed body. Only those who are ready to erase their history and pass by negating a large part of their life get access to this world. Mock being not ready to do that could never become a “real woman” regardless of the fact that she underwent surgery and she had a passable body. Post-transition, Mock says, it took her years to come to terms with her body. Though her body was ideal in its conventional sense, she says she was “still wracked

with insecurity about the size of...thighs, the attractiveness of...vagina, the diameter and darkness of ...areolas” (Mock 238). But at the same time by extending all these insecurities to women in general, not something unique to trans women, Mock shatters the notions of realness attributed to those who were sex-gender congruent and thus challenges the normative/non-normative binary that objectifies trans people.

Instead of fettering gender identity to the materiality of the body, these 21st century trans life narratives tie gender identity to “personhood and ‘self’, the whole range of human subjectivities” (Epstein and Straub 11). Julia Epstein and Christina Straub in the “Introduction” to their edited volume *Body Guards* trace the political, social, and historical development of body politics and the sex/gender binary. They expose the politics of subjugation included in the normalization of an ideally sexed body with rightly assigned gender publicized by the medical discourses. They question the authority of medical discourses to assign gender.

The lay term “sex change operation” on the one hand and the official medical language of ‘gender reassignment surgery’ on the other raise intriguing questions about naming. Biomedical discourse views sex as unalterable but gender as constructible, what does it mean that gender can be assigned? And, most importantly, who is authorized to do the assigning?” (Epstein and Straub 26).

The prominence of sex reassignment surgery in early trans life narratives thus reaffirms the Western paradigm of sex and gender that are regarded as natural, stable, and inevitable “that there are only two sexes and that these are inviolable and are determined by genitalia” (Bolin 454). Bonnie B. Spanier exposes the heterosexist agenda of the Western patriarchal society of establishing the biological sex binary as

the only natural and inherent mode of existence. The institutionalization of gender identity as the natural outcome of one's external anatomy caters to the sustenance of dominant social structures. The biological determinist perspective that promoted the practice of imposing dualistic genders proposed by different fields of scientific investigations thus established transsexuality as a disorder. It is this cultural context that ratified the wrong body notion promoted by early writers of trans life narratives. An individual with the genitalia of one sex performing as the other gender unsettled the hierarchical structure of the system which demanded an immediate fix. As stated by Bonnie B. Spanier, "the sociopolitical construction of science is inextricably intertwined with the sociopolitical construction of gender and sexual ambiguity. Just as each construction reinforces the other both must be deconstructed in tandem" (344). It is this task of reconstructing biological essentialism that the contemporary trans autobiographers have undertaken by either rejecting or questioning the wrong body narrative trope of the early trans life narratives. While the medical transition of one's body from that of a biological male/female to female/male was a gesture enough to repudiate the essentialist ideals of sex and correspondingly gender as immutable, stable, and natural, the early trans life narrators adopted this as a means of correcting their disorder so that they can rehabilitate themselves into the heteronormative society.

Nancy Scheper Hughes and Margaret M Lock offer a comprehensive analysis of the conception of body and body image in their essay "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology." They propose a "three bodies" theory to substantiate their point which are the "individual body, the social body and the body politic." The individual body is "understood in the phenomenological sense of the lived experience of the body self", social body refers

to the “representational use of the body as a natural symbol with which to think about nature, society and culture”. The third is the body politic which refers to the regulation, surveillance, and control of bodies (individual and collective) in reproduction and sexuality, in work and leisure, in sickness and other forms of deviance, and human difference.” This third body “is the most dynamic in suggesting why and how certain kinds of bodies are socially produced” (Hughes and Lock 8). Body politic is thus related to the exercise of power and control over a community by stating some bodies as the norm and others as deviant. For a structured society, “the politically correct” body for both sexes is the lean, strong, and physically fit form with specific masculine or feminine features which manifest the values of the culture of which it forms part. This politically correct body anticipates one that is gender-sex aligned with no incongruity between the two. The medical establishment’s eagerness to construct such bodies in cases of intersexuality and gender dysphoria should be understood in the context of body politics.

For Green, a rightly aligned material body becomes a means to gain visibility and a sense of security. But he warns trans people against the urge to use this body for making claims in favour of “the real”, “a phrase that...can never quite shed its normativizing and disciplinary dimensions” (Salamon 3). Taking cues from Phenomenology, Psychology and transgender theory, Gayle Salamon asserts the “felt sense of the body” (Salamon 3) as central to the idea of assuming a body. For some, this felt sense needs to be materialized in concrete terms, but for others, it need not. It is this freedom of choice, the multifarious ways in which trans people externalize their felt sense of the body that gets denied in canonical trans life narratives. Denying membership in a gender category based on the absence of or unwillingness to have a body that has material specificity is caused by the disavowal between the corporeal

reality of a material body and one's felt sense of one's body. The demand for a normatively sexed body is held as the prerequisite for a normatively gendered identity by early trans life narratives. The publication of life narratives by those who identify themselves as gender non-binary in the 21st century unsettled this cultural production of heteronormativity, a project knowingly or unknowingly undertaken by canonical texts. Jacob Tobia's deliberations on how they understood their body and felt happy as a female in their male body erases the distance between the phantasmatic and the material sense of body. In various transgender theorizations, this felt sense of the body as male or female becomes the ground on which the notions of identity and "realness" rests.

For Jamison Green, naturalizing this felt sense becomes the language with which he communicates his visibility to the world. Green agrees that the appearance of conformity with normative gender behaviour does cause less social friction" (Green 128). Body is the common language using which the socially constructed meanings of genders are "defined, negotiated, corroborated or challenged" (Green 191) between a speaker and a listener. So "if we don't speak a language that others understand, then it can be a source of difficulty, even conflict" (Green 191) in an intolerant environment of heteronormativity. According to Green, a female-to-male transsexual is not a woman who wanted to be a man, but a man who wanted to make himself visible using the language of the body. Green says, "From my perspective, my gender has not changed: I have simply made its message clear. That may be a kind of social construction, but it is not the construction of my gender, it is the construction of my social relationships" (Green 192). In other words, he constructed a body to carry the message of his gender which is another social construct. Green's perspective of transition poses a challenge to the heteronormative notion of the rightly sexed body as

the immutable, irreversible, material truth upon which society imposes constructed gender norms. This is a subversive turn of the conventional notion of body as the unchangeable frame within which society constructs a gender identity that fits in perfectly. For Green physical transformation was a “kind of social construction” aimed at conveying his gender preference clearly.

But he clearly states that it is not “genital configuration” (Green 120) that defines one’s sex or gender. Green boldly states that “medical transitions are not right for everyone” and “it isn’t undergoing sex reassignment that makes someone a “real” (Green 90) transsexual even though the medical establishment uses this criterion” (Green 91). In Green’s conceptualization of his transgender identity, the body ceases to be the empirical evidence for the establishment of gender binary. Instead, it becomes something that one constructs and/or deconstructs to fit his gender preference. The body is not a stable marker of gender identity for Green, the acquisition of which according to the earlier trans life narrators helped them to anchor their gender identity. Instead, the body is a social construct complementing his gender identity. He refuses to accept his material body as the pre-existing truth on which to impose his gender. He says, “But it is not a penis that makes me (or anyone else who has one) a man. A man’s penis is a specialized, appreciated and sometimes maligned part of his anatomy, nothing more. Without it, a man would still be a man” (Green 152).

Green says sex reassignment surgery adopted by a trans as part of gaining self-acceptance, is like any other form of body modification. Green cites the example of a woman who loved the image of femininity projected by the Barbie doll and subjected herself to scores of plastic surgeries to become like Barbie. For him “Changing one’s body and a sex change is not necessarily part of a search for perfection or a reification

of stereotypes” (Green 89). By comparing sex transition to other modes of body modifications, Green is extending the “wrong body” theory to cisgender people also. He argues that the feeling of being trapped in the wrong body and attempts made towards correcting that is not just specific to trans people. He compares sex reassignment to any other form of medical procedure, clinical or cosmetic, that one subjects oneself to feel comfortable with one’s body or to align one’s body to match the accepted standards of beauty. This is a highly political stance whereby he removes the stigma of essentialism from the trans community. When all those whose body-gender alignment is in line with the norm have accepted the gender binary, and there is no much commotion about it, Green asks, then why would transsexual people be called agents reinforcing that binary? Throughout the text, Green employs brilliant modes of subversion whereby he successfully challenges both cisgender as well as essentialist transsexual notions about body and gender. One such interesting argument is one where Green replaces the usage of “biological men” or “genetic men” with “non-transsexual” as a comparative term, placing the lack in the camp of the other” (Green 210). His comparison of body transformation in trans people and the same done on cisgender bodies or intersex people further extends the notions of body and body image to humans in general, irrespective of their gender-sex category.

Gayle Salamon citing the Psychoanalytic concept of bodily ego states that “the body one feels oneself to have is not necessarily the same body that is delimited by its exterior contours, and that is the case even for a normatively gendered subject” (14). The incongruity between one’s sense of body image and the real body, according to Green is a universal phenomenon not just peculiar to trans. In opposition to the normalizing approaches made by earlier trans life narrators, Green adopts a more realistic take on identity and subjectivity. He rejects the claims of “realness” made by

earlier authors in favour of an understanding and acceptance of his identity as different from the normatively gendered people. He openly critiques the members of his own community “who would talk about wanting to disappear, transition and then reappear as a different person so no one would ever have to know about their past” (Green 128). Green blames such attempts at passing as an externalization of the “internalized transphobia and shame” (Green 214). Green promotes visibility as the only means by which trans people could tackle the issues of transphobia. Unlike his predecessors, Green’s memoir is not about “becoming a man”, but it is about “becoming a visible man.”

Janet Mock affirms that she knew she was a woman “regardless of what lay between my legs” (Mock 188). Mock thus disavows the notion of body as the material evidence of gender identity. Bornstein, even after transition and in whatever cloth she dressed up would see herself as “a man in a dress” in the mirror (Bornstein, *Queer* 240). She describes herself as a “forty-year-old man with a surgically constructed vagina” (*Queer* 203). Tobia rejects body as something bearing the ideological weight of gender. They opine, “bodies no longer signified behaviour or character traits; breasts were breasts, nipples were nipples, genitals were genitals, hair was hair, nothing more” (Tobia 182). Unlike traditional transition narratives that portrayed the body as a source of difficulty, Tobia found that their body offered them “protection and a stable identity” (Tobia 69) even though they presented as visibly feminine. Tobia thus challenges the role of body as the conveyor of clear gender signification. Tobia says, “My physical body kept me safe where my gender identity was so uncertain. I’m sure my classmates looked at me with some frequency and thought, *Jacob is really feminine, huh?* But that thought was almost always countered with ‘But he’s already shaving....’” (69). Meredith Talusan also negates sex as the material

reality that contributes to the construction of gender. For her, gender reassignment surgery felt like nothing but cosmetic surgery, just like a nose job that changed “a body part’s aesthetic appearance while keeping its function intact.” She opines that the masculine/feminine meanings that are attributed to the body is nothing but “the meaning our society invested in one body part versus the other” (Talusán 131).

Judith Butler while talking about the constructive nature of sex states that there is no “prediscursive sex” (*Bodies* xi) that can function as a fixed point of gender reference. According to Butler sex is “normative” a “regulatory ideal” that,

produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls. Thus, “sex” is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, “sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. (*Bodies* 2)

By refusing to accept the body as the stable marker of gender, all these writers challenge the normative and regulatory power of sex. The writers of the 20th century conformed to the regulatory norms of sex to “materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative” (Butler, *Bodies* 2). As per the conventional constructivist theory of gender, anatomy was fixed according to which society constructed gender. This construction of gender, again, was not done by the individual. As stated by Simone de Beauvoir, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (330). The act of ‘becoming’ was managed under the aegis of the culture and society in which one was born with either a male or female anatomy. The agency of becoming was conferred not on the individual but the society. Thus, gender was defined as a social construction. But Green, Mock, Bornstein, Talusan, and Tobia

extend this constructivist theory to accommodate sex too. For Green, he constructed his body, with full agency, to fit in his gender. Janet Mock interprets Beauvoir's statement as one that inspires womanhood in her. She claims the agency of the process of her becoming a woman thus rejecting society and culture as the custodians for conferring gender identity to one. She states,

Becoming is the action that births our womanhood rather than the passive act of being *born* (an act none of us has a choice in). This short, powerful statement assured me that I have the freedom, in spite of *and* because of my birth, body, race, gender expectations and economic resources, to define myself for myself and for others. (172)

Mock agrees that being born in a particular body was beyond her control. But deciding what to do with that body and how to use that to match the gender identity that she thought fits for her, irrespective of the body she was born with forms part of her very process of becoming, the full agency of which, she claimed. It can be said to some extent that the early trans life narrators also claimed body autonomy with their decision to change it to reflect their gender preference. But by embracing the conventions of cisgender identity post-transition, they appear to have bought into the norms of the gender binary. In this regard their transition becomes essentialist. But the transsexual authors selected for the current research go beyond traditional boundaries and the binary paradigm. Through openly discussing their transition and embracing their transsexual identity with pride, they adopt a subversive stance. Unlike the early autobiographers, for whom their body becomes the testimony of who they are, the writers of the 21st century state that "we are more than our bodies: we all have different relationships to our bodies; our bodies are ours to do what we want with" (Mock 172).

For Green, his physical transition didn't make him more of a man but smoothed his social interactions within a heteronormative social frame. Green's stand is exactly the opposite of his predecessors for whom body transformation was the only way to confirm their gender identity and make their journey towards being a real man/woman successful. He rejects the earlier trans autobiographers' claims of becoming a conventionally gendered being post-surgery. Instead of passing after transition, Green boldly declares "Whether or not I ever changed my body, I would always be not completely male and not completely female, even though I know, I would fit in the world better as a man. I would always be different than other conventionally gendered beings" (Green 190). For him changing his sex to reflect his masculinity did not narrow down his understanding of gender nor did it make him feel that he is devoid of any traces of femininity. Instead, it broadened his understanding of "what it can mean socially to be labelled 'man' or 'woman'" (Green 191). Green defines himself as differently gendered before and after medical transition.

Green's transsexual status thus emerges as a text with "the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries" (Stone 296). Instead of passing through the "effacement of the prior gender role" by constructing "plausible histories" (Stone 296), Green proudly embraces his trans identity even when he was in the possession of an "ideal male body" that could easily confirm his identity as a heterosexual male. He states the fact that transition will not put an end to one's transgender status. Instead, the problems will remain "transforming with us" (Green 183). Green thus breaks the myth of "living happily ever after in right bodies post-transition" put forward by early trans life narratives. For Green, rather than

...serving as a gateway to a gender-essential heteronormative identity, transition becomes a vantage point from which to appreciate the manifold ways in which gender can be presented and experienced against the monolithic narratives on gender available. Medical transition, instead of closing the possibility of appreciating the diversity of gender by neatly categorizing people into real men/ women as proposed by others, opened “so many windows on the gender system” for Green to observe and appreciate (Green 183).

The first chapter of Green’s memoir titled “How do you Know” sets the counter-discursive tone of his narration. He begins by describing how he introduces the concept of transgender to an audience of teenagers eagerly waiting to listen to their “male professor” who is “short, athletically built with a full, trimmed beard, a balding head and a deep voice” (Green 1), an archetypal masculine figure. Gradually he exposes the absurdity of biological essentialism, of labelling one as a man or woman based on one’s appearance by telling the students that he was assigned female at birth. This startling revelation unsettles the preconceived notions of sex and gender. These introductory remarks are aimed at reversing the biological base of gender identity based on which a child is categorized as male or female. Presenting himself as evidence, Green states that “We are much more complex than the colour of our skin and hair, or the shape of our genitals” (4). Challenging the usual trans transition narratives that always projected the trans person’s feelings of shock, embarrassment, shame, and lack of comfort as he/she lives as the deviant outside heteronormative structure, Green speaks about how such diverse gender performance throws the cisgender person’s “sense of confidence or solidarity out of balance” (Green 6). For Green, the cognitive process of heteronormative society about gender identity is based

on an arbitrary system of categorization based on the observable physical attributes which fail to recalibrate this system to accommodate trans people. He says,

We tend to prefer our male-bodied people to have masculine gender characteristics and our female-bodied people to have feminine gender characteristics, and when they don't, particularly if the dichotomy is highly visible, it can make some people uncomfortable, even angry when they feel they don't know how to classify the person they are observing, or when the other person's gender qualities threaten the observer's sense of confidence in her or his own gender. (6)

Janet Mock also applies this trans gaze to reject the society that blames a trans individual for betraying others by not revealing his/her transness. For Mock, she "is not responsible for other people's perceptions and what they consider real or fake." she demands an abolishment of all the rights and privileges of the heteronormative society that tricks them to believe that they, with their limited and regulatory notions about sex and gender, have the "right to make assumptions about people's identities and project those assumptions onto their gender and bodies" (Mock 257). For Bornstein, her trans gaze allowed her to see herself as a boy, not a man, in a girl's, not a woman's body (*Queer* 227). Bornstein totally refuses to abide by the heteronormative standards of sex-gender identification. After the physical transition, she calls herself a "tranny", not a woman and states that she was "beginning to feel comfortable and less ashamed of being a girl who was partly a boy" (Bornstein, *Queer* 227). The cisgender convention of labelling others as man/woman based on the presence or absence of penis/ vagina is being critiqued and made fun of by looking at it from a trans perspective.

According to Tobia the prevalence of transition stories as accepted by the

cisgender society is an instance of the limits of cisgender imagination. They subvert the cisgender gaze of trans stories as mere transition stories by stating that it is not because there are no other ways in which trans people embrace their transness, but because it is impossible for cisgender world to imagine an identity outside the heteronormative frame. They say, “It seems to be the only trans narrative that cisgender people want to hear; the only trans story that cisgender people can comprehend. I’m exhausted by the limits of cisgender imagination” (Tobia 13).

Tobia, by being a woman in their male body has ruptured the heteronormative world’s fixation on the body. The cisgender gaze that viewed male and female bodies as different and explained everything about gender identity based on this difference is made fun of by Tobia in their narrative. Tobia relates to this idea as mythological. They say, “Through its magical, determinative power, my pee-pee explained everything that I had to be. The mystical other type of pee-pee explained why I couldn’t play with Barbies.... Genitals had the power to tell us everything about who we were, about how we should function in the world. They determined the future” (Tobia 37).

Tobia makes fun of the cisgender dependence and reverence for genitals in deciding the gender and thereby the future of an individual. Tobia, to comprehend the difference between boys and girls, decides to compare the two types of “pee-pees”, and their alchemy, so as to understand gender stuff. But their first exposure to the other kind of “pee-pee” (female genitalia) disappointed Tobia. Based on the heteronormative world’s fixation on the genitalia as the reason for gender difference, Tobia was expecting something more dramatic, “some kind of magical portal down there...something shiny and crazy...tentacles or claw or pincers or dragon fangs or wings” (Tobia 39). Thus, for Tobia, gender difference based on genitalia was nothing

but made-up stuff by adults when “they don’t know how to explain what’s really going on” (Tobia 40). Like Green, Tobia also considers the cisgender world as incapable of reforming their understanding of gender variance.

This trans gaze with which these writers critique heteronormativity effectively produces a counter-discourse invalidating all the claims of normalcy so far made by the heteronormative world. Green reverses the gender hierarchy of heteronormativity by which cisgender was the norm and trans was the marginalized other. In Green’s scheme, sex-gender incongruity of trans is powerful enough to rupture the very foundations of heteronormativity. The writers of canonical trans life narratives looked at themselves from a cisgender gaze and found normalcy lacking in them. They defined themselves as deviant bodies in need of a fix. Green’s narrative, on the other hand, adopts a trans perspective with which to assess themselves and their place in society. This fundamentally brings a paradigm shift. He advocates body transition as a way to better self-acceptance. But fixing the body through medical transition never becomes his destination. He seldom attempts to depict himself as a “real man”. He uses his medically transitioned body not as a token to gain access to the category of “real man”. Instead, he uses it to break the stereotypical images of the trans body as artificial, lacking in perfection, and easily identifiable and androgynous. His body and his trans identity function as an antithesis to people’s belief that they know “what transsexual people look like” (Green 9) since his body doesn’t fit the anticipated trans appearance. For Green cisgender people expecting him to act like a woman because he had a female body is absurd. He presented himself according to his conviction and beliefs about his gender because “gender identity-the sense of self is stronger than the body and will find a way to manifest itself” (Green 8). In Green’s narration body is relegated to the passenger seat and gender occupies the “driver’s seat” (Green 8).

Green accepts the reality of sex-gender incongruity that trans people experience and how often this becomes a distinctive experience differentiating trans people from homosexually oriented people. Often trans people are mistakenly identified by others as well as themselves as homosexual and made targets of homophobia. Unlike cross-dressers or homosexuals, some trans people feel an urgent need for surgical assistance to change their bodies for both self-acceptance as well as for full legal and social validation of their gender identity. Green, like most of the earlier trans life narrators acknowledges the feelings of being born in the wrong body or trapped in the wrong body as legit. At the same time, he adopts a more inclusive stance by rejecting the notion of “true transsexuals.” He says “However, not all people who identify as transsexual actually seek medical assistance and not all who experience a medical sex transition identify as transsexual” (Green 14). Challenging the earlier rigid compartmentalization of those who medically transitioned as true transsexuals and others as mere imitators or impersonators propagated by earlier life narratives, Green used a more politically conscious and rational choice of words to refer to people who cross-gender identify.

Green advocates a more inclusive approach in favour of diversity seen within the trans community. For him “transgender” the umbrella term used to represent gender-variant people is a “broad, new and subjective” category, but should not be used as a euphemism for transsexuals” (Green 14). Green specifically examines the legal and social implications of using these terms. For instance, the use of the term “transgender care” by health insurance administration primarily refers to an attempt to ensure basic general health care to gender variant people. But this in effect will deny the hormonal treatment and surgical reassignment provisions for people who identify themselves as transsexuals. Green respects the needs of those gender variant people

for whom medical transition is of utmost importance to realize their gender identity. He states, “To use transgender” and “transsexual” interchangeably is to erase both individual experience and the very different social needs of these diverse categories” (Green 14).

The early narratives promulgated body transition as the only means to fix true transsexualism and thus enunciated an exclusionary gender politics. Green on the other hand settling on the use of the more general and inclusive term ‘trans’ while referring to gender variant people in general but insisting on the use of “transsexual” while referring to those who prefer body transition is rejecting the early narratives in favour of a more inclusive trans politics. He acknowledges heterogeneity with regard to gender variance as against the homogenizing tendencies of the early wrong body narratives. While narrating his experience, he says, “I do not -ever-claim to be describing all transgender or transsexual experience at any time. Trans people are far too diverse for that. I also do not believe that there is any one way, or any better way, to be transgendered or transsexual, or that one expression is more real or valid than any other” (15). Green’s attempt here is to create a personal narrative of his gendered subjectivity, but without negating the varied life experiences of others. Green clearly states that though some trans people feel the urge to align their bodies to their preferred gender identities, transness is not always about a shift from one side of the gender binary to the other. Green’s memoir thus reverses the narrow and essentialist focus of the earlier dominant trans narratives on one kind of transness as the norm by offering an alternative and broader narrative. Talia Mae Bettcher marks this shift in approach evident in contemporary trans narratives when she says:

Many of us have not undergone genital reconstruction surgery, and many of us do not want to, however, some of us have surgically altered our bodies in

different ways (and some have not), some of us take hormones (and some of us do not), and some of us have had silicone injections (and some have not).

For the most part, we believe our genital configurations do not undermine the facts about who we are. (Bettcher 388)

21st century trans life narratives chosen for the current study propagate this gender politics according to which the body ceases to carry the semantic weight of gender identity and body transformations cease to be imperative to present oneself in particular gender behaviour. This approach keeps trans life in constant resistance to the dominant heteronormative world. To add to this, the tendency of trans identity politics has become more inclusive of both transsexual and transgender identities by respecting individual choice, unlike the canonical narratives which insisted on the possession of the 'right body' to get access to a particular gender category. Instead of feeding the dominant culture of gender binary, it challenges these norms. It is also imperative to note that both the 'beyond the binary' as well as the 'wrong body models' are guilty of taking the hegemonic structure of gender as the context of their discourse thereby eliminating the chances of producing resistant readings.

The prospect of changing one's sex with the aid of medical science has the potential of presenting a counter-discourse to biological essentialism by exposing the absurdity of gender assignment based on biology. But the way it manifests in canonical trans life narratives further accentuated the claims of biologism instead of breaking it by professing body transformation as the magical remedy to reinstate sex-gender congruity for gender variant people and by promoting passing as a cisgender after transition. Contemporary trans life narrative made their departure from canonical narratives at this critical juncture to produce reverse discourse.

Bettcher, by stating that some of them prefer genital reconstruction surgery but

some of them do not, is rejecting the conventional insistence on the genital configuration to either undermine or substantiate the way one feels about his/her gender. This perspective of autonomy with regard to the decisions related to body transformation largely granted agency to the trans subjects to decide what is good for them, unlike the prescriptive nature of early trans life writings which projected sex reassignment as the only legitimate way to deal with gender confusion. The wrong body model, by willingly engaging with patriarchy and biological determinism, largely failed to consider the question of the agency of transsexual subjects. Bernice Hausman in her book *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology and the Idea of Gender* discusses the question of transsexual agency. She recognizes transsexuals as subjects with agency since it was transsexuals who initiated the process of surgical transition by describing their condition and demanding medical intervention.

Hausman identifies a dialectical process between transsexuals who demanded transition and physicians who set the conditions for granting transition which led to the categorization of transsexualism as a disorder in the 1980s'. According to Hausman, "By demanding sex change, transsexuals distinguished themselves from transvestite and homosexual subjects — the other designations available in the sexological discourses of the period to identify cross-sex proclivities — and thus engaged actively in producing themselves as subjects" (111). But this agency, according to Hausman "does not suggest that transsexuals are all powerful in the context of the medical establishment, nor that this agency is unproblematic" (118). In the 19th and 20th century medical model of transsexualism, the transsexual agency was only up to the point of expressing their sense of belonging to the gender opposite to the one assigned to them at birth. To prove this, transsexuals had to passively reiterate the behavioural patterns and the sense of body dysphoria as laid down by the medical

establishment thus reducing themselves from active agents to passive objects. Since the only legitimate form of transness as per the available medical literature was transsexualism, a curable medical condition as per medical science, with all the other gender expressions outside the binary categorized as deviations, trans people were forced to play the prescribed model with no agency to decide the course of action to be taken to deal with their transness. The legitimization of transsexuals which happened during the late 19th and 20th centuries and the transgender romanticization that happened later in the discursive realms of trans theorization during and after the 1990s' were both prescriptive in nature. Instead of allowing the trans subject the agency to decide, both negated a trans subject's right to feel comfortable with his/her body either through transition or through the rejection of the medical model. (Prosser 2005)

The canonical trans life stories' projection of gender dysphoria characterized by an intense sense of discomfort with the bodies they were born with leading to an intense desire for transition rented the experience of those trans people who rarely felt any sense of body dysphoria as invalid. While accepting the truth of dissatisfaction a trans person feels with his /her assigned sex, this exclusive focus on "born this way" or "trapped in the wrong body" stories reinforced the pathologization and medicalization of trans identities and took the edge off the wide spectrum of gender identities. The alternative narratives offered by Janet Mock, Jacob Tobia, Jamison Green, Kate Bornstein, and Meredith Talusan become political statements made in favour of inclusion and intersectionality in this regard. These authors become "Gender defenders" in the sense in which Kate Bornstein referred to those who work to rupture the foundations of rigid gender norms (*Gender Outlaw* 72). The ideological shift in these texts from the materiality of the body to one's "felt sense" of oneself as separate

from the body proves to be “of use to genderqueer communities because it shows that the body of which one supposedly has a “felt sense” is not necessarily contiguous with the physical body as it is perceived from the outside, thus complicating the notion of the subject’s relationship to the materiality of her own body” (Salamon 4).

All conventional trans life narratives were restrictive in the sense that they professed some kind of closure to their discourses, a point where it merges and subsequently vanishes within the notion of binary. They all followed a linear narrative which normally began with gender identity confusion and ended with body transition. Thus, instead of constituting an identity in defiance of the norm, they projected one in accordance with heteronormativity. According to Chiara Pellegrini, “Trans subjects are offered a medico-legal timeline with the officially sanctioned process of gender confirmation- a timeline repeated in the canonical narratives of the trans memoir” (2). This timeline begins at a point in the past where the subject encounters gender identity confusion as a child and then gradually move towards permanence and closure through medical transition. The materiality of embodiment, the somatic transformation becomes the turning point in this passage towards a stable identity formation. But a large number of trans life narratives that emerged after the publication of Sandy Stone’s “Posttranssexual Manifesto”, have challenged this narrative pattern by exposing trans life experience to be “irreducible to the presupposed chronological progression from a terrible-present-in-the-wrong body to a better-future-in-the-right -body” (Pellegrini 3). Conventional narratives thus established a discourse of transnormativity. Trans subjects felt the need to conform to the norms of transnormativity which allowed them to go through a phase of confusion, unruliness, and instability only to take them closer to physical transition through sex reassignment. Physical transition thus officially signals the closure of this

narrative. Post-surgery they are projected as “normal” subjects within the realms of accepted norms of transnormativity and hence through that, as legally normal members of society. Those who do not subject themselves to this somatic change are placed in a very challenging situation. “Subjects who are not seen as completing these steps are at risk of being read as dwelling in a time of precariousness and unpredictability that is viewed with anxiety” (Pellegrini 4).

But the posttranssexual texts challenge this by presenting growth and change even beyond the point of surgery. Instead of closing the narrative on an assimilationist note, they boldly talk about the complexities of this somatic change, and some even challenge the notions of stability and security supposed to be attained post-surgery by talking about how even after surgery they found themselves in an in-between state. Thus, posttranssexual texts resist and often defy the trans normative demands and thus question the dominant discourse on gender. The canonical trans life narratives projected the pre-surgery past as one of suffering and discomfort and the post-surgery phase as “feeling at home in the right body”. Sarah Ray Rondot in her essay “Bear Witness and Build Legacies: Twentieth and Twenty-first century Trans Autobiography” mentions that gender confirmation surgery in canonical trans life narratives is “designed to create normative women out of disordered men” in an attempt to create acceptable, recognizable gendered subjects as per medico-legal discourses. This resolves conflict and contradictions in gender identity and “sanctions the arrival of the trans citizen into society as a disciplined subject” (Pellegrini 7).

The wrong body narrative timeline of early transgender life narratives was constricting in the sense that they exhibited an urge to follow normative paths. Having a socially acceptable recognizably gendered body has the potential of validating the identity of an individual in a cultural context that prioritizes heteronormativity. It is

this urge for belonging and integrity which Jay Prosser refers to as “gendered realness” (Prosser 11) that entails a focus on body transformation through gender confirmation surgeries in trans life narratives. But this urge for sexed realness in early trans life narratives projected a deep-felt desire to disentangle with one’s transness and deliberate negation of one’s past. To make it more problematic, all the early authors rearticulated biological essentialism in their post-surgery phase in a validating tone. This urge for passing according to Sandy Stone makes such trans discourses essentialist and she demands that the writers of trans life narratives should project a posttranssexual sense of embodiment.

For Prosser, the trans identity prescribed by Stone’s posttranssexual ideology excludes the experience of some by negating the embodied reality of gender identity. This points to the need for a balance in trans life narratives that, without denying trans people the materiality of embodied gender experience, will provide an opportunity to challenge and reverse the heterosexist tone of canonical trans life narratives. This is what the select 21st century trans life narratives have achieved. They are posttranssexual without being queerly positioned. There is an interesting balance achieved between the wrong body and the beyond the binary modes of trans subjectivities. Among the five authors chosen for the present study, four authors, Kate Bornstein Jamison Green, Janet Mock, and Meredith Talusan, express their feeling about their gendered selves not being in alignment with their bodies. They opted for physical transition as a way to a better sense of self-acceptance and self-harmony, thus acknowledging an individual’s desire for material embodiment. Whereas one, Jacob Tobia, though they feel their body to be differently aligned to their gender preference, finds it an opportunity to explore the multidimensional possibilities of using the same body for their preferred gender expression by rejecting the dictates of

the sex-gender binary. Both these approaches shatter the dominant discourses on heteronormativity and offer a counter-discourse to promote trans inclusion. The trans writers of the 21st century exhibit less obsession with the rightly sexed body as the prerequisite for validating their gendered embodiment. Passing and biologism are rejected and replaced by visibility and trans advocacy.

An analysis of these writers' relationship with their bodies and their rejection of the conventional wrong body model of trans identity indicates to a larger political movement. The texts chosen for the current study emphasise an expressed refusal to disappear, a strategic move, the purpose of which is to "produce transgendered and transsexual as specific and, importantly, allied subjectivities" (Prosser 11). Thus, it becomes more inclusive without negating the specificity of the experience of none. It propagates a more neutral trans ideology where everyone has the space to explore his/her gendered embodiment the way he/she prefers. At the same time, this is a cautionary move that prevents trans from becoming essentialist and conformist with regard to their gender preference. While discussing this move from transsexual to transgendered, Prosser states, "Transsexual and transgendered narratives alike produce not the revelation of the fictionality of gender categories but the sobering realization of their ongoing foundational power" (Prosser 11). While transsexual wrong body narratives reiterated the gender categories of the dominant discourses, the posttranssexual allowed for variance in gendered embodiment and delinked sex from gender identity. These writers project a body that is always in the process of drifting, one that is evolving and fluctuating. These narratives displace the centrality of body in identity formation and showcase that "we no longer inhabit a body in any meaningful sense of the term but rather occupy a multiplicity of bodies—imaginary, sexualized, disciplined, gendered, laboring, technologically augmented bodies (Kroker 2).

Chapter V

The Trans Desire: Revisionary Notions of Trans Sexuality

The assumption that one thing always leads to another, that gay sexual expression leads to gender incongruity or gender incongruity leads to shifts in sexual orientation, or that any of these things is inherently wrong if it were to occur, is illogical.

(Green 161)

Compulsory heterosexuality is the edifice on which gender dichotomy and heteronormativity are constructed. The dominant narratives on transsexuality that gained currency during the 20th century normalized heterosexuality just as they had normalized biological essentialism and gender binary. All these narratives were centred around the conservative presumption of heteronormative discourse that a human being is only attracted to another of the opposite sex and gender. Champions of heteronormativity went so far as to construe transsexuality as the reflection of an individual's desire to integrate into a heterosexual relationship. In short, transsexuality was misinterpreted as a means adopted by lesbians and gays to escape the taboo of homosexuality in a social structure that is homophobic.

American Psychological Association (APA) defines sexual orientation as “the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted” (*Guidelines* 11). As per heteronormativity, this attraction happens only between people of the opposite sex and gender identity. The early trans life narratives conflated gender and sexuality. Hence to be a “true” transsexual, a trans man is expected to be attracted to a woman and a trans woman to a man. Hence, the ratification to establish one's gender identity as “real” was to prove oneself to be a heterosexual. Anything outside this norm will challenge the credibility of their gender status. Hence all the early trans life narratives

depicted heterosexuality as the natural and the only possible manifestation of their sexual desire. This dominant narrative marginalized those trans people who were non-heterosexual, people who identified themselves as homosexual, pansexual, or bisexual. This chapter explores how the authors chosen for this study question and reverse this narrative by being honest about their sexuality which is not always in conformity with the dictates of heterosexuality. They sever the conservative link between gender and sexuality and state that one's sexual orientation does not decide one's gender identity.

All the early trans life narratives followed a narrative frame that rightly aligned with the expectations of the heteronormative society regarding their sexual orientation. They read gendered meanings into their desire and reconstituted the same in favour of heterosexuality so that they will be judged as "normal" by the hegemonic discourse on gender and sexuality. Most of them restrained from stating anything about their pre-transition sexual orientation in their life narratives to escape being labelled as homosexuals against their consent. Talking about the canonical transgender migrating stories, Ekins and King opine that "the issue of sexuality has been rather underplayed in the transgender migrating stories" (*Transgender Phenomenon* 53).

Initially, before the advent of the medical and psychiatric discourse on transsexuality, those who expressed their wish to migrate from their assigned gender to the opposite one were termed 'inverts' or 'fetishists'. Their gender identity dilemma was misunderstood as an expression of their homosexual desires. Subsequently, the emergence of the transsexual category and the studies distinguishing between gender identity and sexuality led to the differentiation of trans individuals from homosexuals or transvestites. Even then any reference to one's

sexual desire before the official medical transition of sex was complicated as it could create hurdles in establishing oneself as a “true transsexual” to qualify for medical transition. Ekins and King remark,

sexuality was always a difficult topic. If an MTF transsexual admitted to having a sexual attraction to men, that implied homosexuality which ruled out surgery in some eyes. Similarly, to admit a sexual attraction to women somehow implied that the MTF trans person was not a ‘real’ woman who was thought to be attracted to men. The person who admitted to masturbating while cross-dressed risked being classified as a transvestite. (*Transgender Phenomenon* 53)

All the early trans life narrators made it a point not to mention their pre-transitioned bodies as a source of sexual pleasure because it was against the dictates of medical discourse on transsexuality. An individual capable of drawing sexual gratification from his/her birth genitalia failed the medical norm that a true transsexual hated the body/ genital he/ she was born with. Hence all the early narratives were largely silent about their sexual preferences before transitions. Post-transition, as expected and dictated by the gatekeepers of transsexuality, they depicted themselves as naturally attracted to the opposite sex and gender. As per Harry Benjamin’s *Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966),

The transvestite - they say - is a man, feels himself to be one, is heterosexual, and merely wants to dress as a woman. The transsexual feels himself to be a woman ("trapped in a man's body") and is attracted to men. This makes him a homosexual provided his sex is diagnosed from the state of his body. But he, diagnosing himself in accordance with his female psychological sex, considers his sexual desire for a man to be heterosexual, that is, normal. (14)

While discussing the transsexual's sex life Benjamin remarks, "Many transsexuals have no overt sex life at all. . . . The sex drive in some of them is turned inward toward their own ego. Masturbation is then occasionally practised, but the urge for it is low and under oestrogen treatment gets even lower, to the point of zero" (31). As per Benjamin's Sex Orientation Scale (S.O.S), there are three types of transsexuals, the non-surgical transsexual (type IV in S.O.S), the moderate intensity true transsexual (type V in S.O.S) and the high-intensity true transsexual (type VI in S.O.S). Benjamin differentiates these three types of transsexuals based on their "sex object choice and sex life" (Benjamin 19). The major difference according to Benjamin is the low libido of the pre-transitioned transsexual as compared to the heterosexual/ bisexual/homosexual orientation of the transvestites who derive erotic pleasure through cross-dressing or masturbation. A non-surgical transsexual, not a true transsexual by implication, is described as "Libido often low. Asexual or auto-erotic. Could be bisexual. Could also be married and have children." A moderate-intensity true transsexual can also be "Asexual, auto-erotic, or passive homosexual activity. May have been married and have children." As opposed to this, a true transsexual is one who "intensely desires relations with a normal male [cisgender and heterosexual] as "female," if young. Later, libido low. May have been married and have children, by using fantasies in intercourse" (Benjamin 19). Thus, in Benjamin's scheme, a true transsexual is one who feels no sexual urge before his/her medical transition.

One of the key indicators of true transsexualism according to Benjamin is being heterosexual, which is "normal". The 20th century trans people who sought medical transition by satisfying Benjamin's criteria for true transsexualism were all thus eager to prove themselves as "normal" heterosexuals. The details of their life and

their relation to their body that would prove otherwise were never confessed in front of the medical practitioners. The source and the object of their erotic pleasure had a very decisive role to play in establishing one as a “true transsexual”. The pre-transitioned body and genitalia which a “true transsexual” is expected to hate could never be the source of physical pleasure for someone who is transsexual as per Benjamin’s standards. Also, the object of one’s desire must also justify his/her transsexualism. Sandy Stone refers to the ritual called ‘Wringing the Turkey’s Neck’, the final act of penile masturbation performed by a male-to-female transsexual before sex reassignment surgery which never found a place in early trans life narratives. Stone states, “‘Wringing the turkey's neck’ the ritual of penile masturbation just before surgery, was the most secret of secret traditions. To acknowledge so natural a desire would be to risk ‘crash landing’; that is, ‘role inappropriateness leading to disqualification’” (292). Thus, their entry into the realm of intelligibly gendered was decided partly by their sexual preference. Gender identity was thus fused as one with sexual orientation.

Gender dichotomy and heterosexuality are established as prediscursive axioms that define and regulate culture and civilization. According to Foucault, the seventeenth century “was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies made a display of themselves.” But after the advent of the Victorian bourgeoisie, “Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex, silence became the rule” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 3). The publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1877 (translated to English in 1886) by Richard Von Kraft Ebing, a

professor of Psychiatry from Vienna (1840-1902) can be considered as the first major move towards the medical pathologization of sexuality. His argument was an amalgamation of those of his predecessors like Benedictine Augustus Morel and Cesare Lombroso who tied criminal intent in individuals to their sexual features. Cesare Lombroso in his book *Criminal Man* said that the pattern of hair distribution, the pelvis, the abdomen, and the reproductive organs show the features of the opposite sex in criminals (qtd. in Thomas 95). In Austria, Karl Heinrich Ulrich published booklets, between 1864-65, under the collective title *Researches on the Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love*. He described transgender people as "urnings" who live with "a female soul enclosed within a male body" (qtd. in Stryker, *Transgender History* 43). Following this, German-born Hungarian citizen Karl Maria Kertbeny first coined the term "homosexual" in 1869 (Stryker, *Transgender History* 37). In 1877, Ebing reiterated the same arguments in his text which according to him was an attempt to describe the pathological manifestations of sexual life. He studied others, whom he considered as cases of abnormality, and made his conclusions about them with the authority of a medical practitioner. For him, heterosexual was normal and heterosexuality just for the purpose of procreation was to be allowed. Anything outside of this was abnormal, deviation from the norm, and hence sickness.

Knowledge regarding sexuality, thus became the key to power, with which cultures controlled and regulated their population. According to Foucault, "Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 8). Foucault also traces "four great strategic unities" which, during the early eighteenth century, formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centring on sex. They were "A hysterization of women's bodies", "A pedagogization of children's

sex”, “A socialization of procreative behaviour”, and “A psychiatrization of perverse pleasure” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 104-105). Thus, all those who crossed, violated, or disobeyed these norms were either called criminals or patients in need of medical intervention and help.

Foucault defines this increased interest of state and religion in the regulation of human sexuality as “one of the great innovations in the technique of power in the 18th century” which witnessed the “emergence of population as an economic and political problem, population as wealth, population as manpower or labour capacity, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded” (*Sexuality* 83). Regulating population thus became an urgent need of the state apparatus. According to Foucault,

At the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex: it was necessary to analyze the birth rate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices. (25-26)

The need to regulate population thus imparted the knowledge regarding sexuality immense power. Certain modes of sexualities were deemed normal and natural by this power structure and certain others, not leading to the expected purpose of procreation, became illicit as per this emergent discourse on human sexuality.

Through the political economy of population, there was formed a whole grid of observations regarding sex. There emerged the analysis of the modes of sexual conduct, their determinations and their effects, at the boundary line of the biological and the economic domains. There also appeared those systematic campaigns which, going beyond the traditional means-moral and

religious exhortations, fiscal measures- tried to transform the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted economic and political behaviour. (Foucault, *Sexuality* 26)

18th and 19th centuries witnessed various sites of power like the state, religion, education, medicine, and criminal justice radiating with discourses on sexuality intend on regulating and restricting sexuality within the institution of family and procreation. Foucault cites three major explicit codes that governed sexual practices up to the end of the 18th century, “canonical law, the Christian pastoral and civil law” which determined what is “licit and illicit” regarding human sexuality (*Sexuality* 37). All these norms were centred around “matrimonial relations: the marital obligation, the ability to fulfil it, the manner in which one complied with it” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 37). Breaking the rules of marriage or seeking the pleasure of sex outside marriage was condemned. “Doubtless acts” of sexuality “contrary to nature” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 38) were treated as abominable. There were two major effects of this “discursive explosion on sexuality” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 38). First, heterosexual monogamy became the licit mode or norm of sexuality. Second, all the other peripheral sexualities like “the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex; reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transports of rage” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 3) came under strict public scrutiny. All this culminated in an attempt to understand the truth of sex. Foucault describes this attempt of the West as “Scientia Sexualis” against the “Ars Erotica” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 57) of the East. According to Foucault, in the erotic art of the East,

truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the

permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul. (Foucault, *Sexuality* 57)

Whereas “Scientia Sexualis” of the West was an attempt to constitute sexuality in scientific terms. Foucault comments that the West is undoubtedly the only civilization “to practice scientia sexualis; or rather, the only civilization to have developed over the centuries procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret” (*Sexuality* 58). The truth of sexuality was elicited through confession-religious or medical-and then the confessed truth was decoded to classify it as either normal or deviant. Foucault lists five procedures, the clinical codification of the inducement to speak, the postulate of a general and diffuse causality, the principle of a latency intrinsic to sexuality, the method of interpretation, and the medicalization of the effects of confession by which the will to knowledge regarding sex functioned (*Sexuality* 165-167).

A close reading of the medical discourse on transsexuality will reveal a similar modus operandi adopted to categorize individuals on the basis of the degree of their transsexual urges. The medical confession performed by the candidate is carefully decoded to identify any details that will prove the person’s cross-gender identification as either homosexuality or mere transvestism. This led to the person being confessed getting disqualified for medical transition. Hence all the early trans people were very particular in reproducing a confessional narrative that defined their gender claim as true by placing their sex, gender identity and desire within the confines of heterosexuality. Human sexuality thus became the focal point or the correlative of the

discursive practice called “Scientia Sexualis” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 68). As per this discourse, any mode of human desire outside the norm of heterosexuality was classified as an illness. As stated by Foucault,

Situating at the point of intersection of a technique of confession and a scientific discursivity, where certain major mechanisms had to be found for adapting them to one another (the listening technique, the postulate of causality, the principle of latency, the rule of interpretation, the imperative of medicalization), sexuality was defined as being “by nature”: a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence one calling for therapeutic or normalizing interventions; a field of meanings to decipher; the site of processes concealed by specific mechanisms; a focus of indefinite causal relations; and an obscure speech (parole) that had to be ferreted out and listened to. (*Sexuality* 68)

Judith Butler, citing Gayle Rubin’s essay, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex” states that heterosexual practice plays a significant role in sustaining gender dichotomy. Rubin opined that “The kinds of relationships sexuality established in the dim human past still dominate our sexual lives, our ideas about men and women, and the ways we raise our children” (qtd. in Butler, *Gender Trouble* 199). This “normative sexuality fortifies normative gender” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xi). Butler argues that we live in a heterosexual matrix that enforces a binary structure “in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term” sustained by the practice of compulsory heterosexuality to produce and disseminate ‘gender’ as ‘natural’. “The act of differentiating the two oppositional moments of the binary results in a consolidation of each term, the respective internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 31). A transsexual promoting the

conventions of heterosexuality is thus promoting gender essentialism.

According to Butler, one's membership in this frame of binary as man or woman is valid only "to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose something of one's sense of place in gender" (*Gender Trouble* xi). The same applies to a transsexual also who will be accorded the honour of being a real woman/man only if he/she functions within this restrictive and conservative frame of sexuality. Butler related this mandate to abide by heterosexuality as the reason for "the terror and anxiety that some people suffer in 'becoming gay,' the fear of losing one's place in gender or of not knowing who one will be if one sleeps with someone of the ostensibly 'same' gender" (xi). Sexuality that is deemed as "deviant" or contrary to the norm, thus, bears the power to destabilize gender norms. Becoming culturally intelligible genders, "those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23) thus presupposes being in the heterosexual matrix. Butler in her notes provided at the end of "Prohibition, Psychoanalysis and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix" explains,

I use the term heterosexual matrix throughout the text to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized. . . . For bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (*Gender Trouble* 208)

Just as patriarchy uses the heterosexual matrix as a tool to dominate and regulate women, cisgender society uses the same to further the oppression and

marginalization of trans. Just like a cisman or ciswoman, a trans person may also be naturally inclined to heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, or any other mode of desire. But insisting that a trans individual should be heterosexual to be acceptable as an intelligible entity in an essentialist and conservative gender discourse is a mode of oppression. The insistence on heterosexuality entraps trans people to gender conformism and transnormativism.

As per the 1975 APA guidelines on sexuality, “homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities” and it urged “all mental health professionals to take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with homosexual orientations” (“Guidelines” 10). In 2009, APA affirmed that “same-sex sexual and romantic attractions, feelings, and behaviours are normal and positive variations of human sexuality regardless of sexual orientation identity” (qtd. in “Guidelines” 10). In 2011, APA expanded the range of possible variations of human sexuality by stating that it is a continuum.

Categories of sexual orientation typically have included attraction to members of one’s own sex (gay men or lesbians), attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexuals), and attraction to members of both sexes (bisexuals). Although these categories continue to be widely used, research has suggested that sexual orientation does not always appear in such definable categories and instead occurs on a continuum. (“Guidelines” 11)

Despite all such attempts to normalize variations in human sexuality, heterosexuality still holds sway as the one and only legitimate mode of human sexuality with all the other manifestations of desire subjugated. As per the dominant discourse on gender and sexuality, heterosexuality presumes a natural connection between sex, gender

identity and desire. For a gender variant individual, the only way to enter the space of this authentically gendered one is to realign one's body and desire to match the essentialist discourse on gender. Compulsory heterosexuality practised by the early transsexuals thus echoes their gender conformism. Butler opines that,

The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine,” where these are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female.” The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist”—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender. (*Gender Trouble* 24)

Hence in the hegemonic discourse of gender binary, compulsory heterosexuality entails the truth of gender and those who fail to conform “appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 24). It does not mean that a trans person should embrace homosexuality to subvert the hegemony of heterosexuality and gender dichotomy. All the early narratives on transsexuality projected heterosexual attraction as the natural outcome of their medical transition. They presented heterosexuality as the only possible expression of their desire and thus accorded credibility and authenticity to Benjamin's idea of a “true transsexual” as inherently heterosexual. This tendency to ascribe to the norms of hegemony for social acceptance made these early narratives essentialist, conformist, and exclusionary.

In his theory of ‘repressive hypothesis’ Foucault states that this strict disciplinary regulation of human sexuality during the 18th to the early 20th century has only resulted in a veritable discursive explosion around and apropos of sex (*Sexuality*

17) which led to the “the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. (Foucault, *Sexuality* 101).

Just as homosexuality emerged as a reverse discourse speaking on its own demand, the 21st century trans life narratives started challenging the inception and maintenance of heterosexuality as a positive indicator of true transsexualism by challenging the absurdly established link between gender and sexuality. They sought to prove that one’s gender identity has no direct bearing upon one’s object of desire and mode of sexual gratification. They did not allow their sexual orientation to question and nullify their gender identity. The ideological shift that occurred in trans politics in this regard negates the causal relation that heteronormativity had presupposed among sex, gender, and desire. As per this relation, “desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire. The metaphysical unity of the three is assumed to be truly known and expresses in differentiating desire for an oppositional gender—that is, in a form of oppositional heterosexuality” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 31). By transgressing the norms of the hegemonic discourse of compulsory heterosexuality which presented itself as natural, and universally applicable to all, these writers challenge the presumed internal coherence of sex, gender, and desire.

All the authors chosen for the present study perceive gender identity and sexual orientation as two different and unrelated attributes of an individual’s identity. They propagate the idea that gender identity has no direct bearing on one’s sexual preference. None of these authors endorses heterosexuality as the norm. Kate Bornstein identifies herself as a sadomasochist lesbian and Jacob Tobia as a gay. Jamison Green is bisexual but more comfortable with women and Meredith Talusan is

bisexual. Janet Mock is the only one identifying herself as conventionally heterosexual but without endorsing heterosexuality as the test to authenticate one's gender. By not filtering their memory to exclude instances of them feeling equally comfortable with homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality these writers lift the stigma attached to human desire other than heterosexuality and negate the notion of heterosexuality as the only possible and legit mode of human desire. Unlike the early trans life narrators, these authors do not negate their pre-transitioned/non-transitioned body as a source of sexual gratification. Instead, by being truthful to their experience, they challenge the early narratives' blind conformism to heterosexuality to get accepted as "real" men or women. They also explode the myth of sexual orientation as stable by talking freely about the shifts that they had in their object of desire.

Of all the authors chosen for the current study, the one who challenges the codified norms of heterosexuality the most is Kate Bornstein. According to Butler, "The binary regulation of sexuality suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and medico juridical hegemonies" (*Gender Trouble* 26). Bornstein's memoir, through her bold discussion of the "subversive multiplicity" of her sexuality thus becomes disruptive. Bornstein accomplishes revolutionary reconfiguration of the organizational theories of sexuality propagated by heteronormativity to sustain heterosexuality. Bornstein's memoir amuses and at times startles the readers with her open and unconventional sexual encounters and fantasies. From being a confused adolescent, the book traces Bornstein's journey to that phase of her life where she accepts herself as a transsexual lesbian practising sadomasochism as a consensual slave. The narrative reverberates with terms and practices distinct to the lesbian subculture.

All the early narratives penned by trans women talked at length about their

incapability of penile erection or masturbation. This was the only way to convince the medico-psychiatric experts of their transsexuality. In contrast to the earlier narratives, Bornstein openly embraces the honesty of her pre-transitioned body by acknowledging its role as a potential source of erotic pleasure and by refusing to follow the leitmotif of the early narratives of proclaiming loathing towards the genitalia she was born with. Thus, she negates the medical discourse on transsexuality propagated by Dr. Harry Benjamin which asserted that a transsexual individual, prior to undergoing medical transition to address the condition, would experience a lack of sexual desire. Bornstein thus reverses and exposes the heterosexist agenda of the early trans life narratives.

For Bornstein, sexual pleasure was never an impossibility for a trans person unless he or she claims so to be recognized as a “true transsexual” by the medical discourse. Bornstein openly declares in her narrative that she “had “great” sex, masturbating into a soft sock, hungrily staring” (Bornstein, *Queer* 20) at the photographs of half-nude women appearing in magazines. Acknowledging that she was sexually attracted to women prior to her transition and that she could derive sexual gratification through masturbation while still living as a biological male could endanger the veracity of her claim to womanhood. A trans woman would never make such a ‘confession’ fearing the hurdles it would erect in her way towards becoming a “real woman.” The trans life narratives of the 20th century filtered such details to conform to the norms of heterosexuality. Bornstein, by openly admitting these facts of her life challenges the link the medical establishment had made between gender and sexuality. She is also bold in rejecting heterosexuality’s hegemonic hold by juxtaposing the multiple facets of her sexuality-homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual urges in the narrative. For Bornstein, sexual pleasure does not depend on the

body or the gender of the participants. Rather it relies on the way one perceives the act. Bornstein was happy to be with men who made her feel like a woman, and she imagined herself to be the woman she was pleasing while being with other women.

The open discussion of her experience as a consensual sex slave to the lesbian couple Lula and Sailor while living in Seattle in the 1990s in the last chapter of her narrative imparts an unconventional and revolutionary hue to her memoir.

Bornstein's reclamation of the word 'tranny' to define herself is another bold move made against the cultural morphing of herself to suit the accepted standards of heteronormative propriety. 'Tranny' is a derogatory label used by the cissexist society to insult a trans woman. The term is historically associated with 'impoverished transgender sex worker' (Branfman) and hence unacceptable to the trans community who holds on to the norms of respectability politics to gain social acceptance.

Respectability politics is a strategy adopted by marginalized groups to gain social support and public acceptance by presenting themselves as adhering to the norms of behaviour, appearance, and lifestyle prescribed by the hegemonic mainstream society.

The increasing tendency of the LGBTIQ+ communities to project same-sex relationships as "just-like" heterosexual ones as part of this respectability politics was highly critiqued. Respectability thus becomes yet another system of domination rooted in the hierarchical relation between the "respectable" and the "aberrant". A transsexual projecting his/her sexuality as similar to that of a cissexual as well as a homosexual simulating the conventions of heterosexuality with a dominating male and a submissive female are also part of this attempt to maintain the status quo of heteronormativity to gain social acceptance through conforming to the dominant discourse. The butch-femme convention amongst homosexuals is often critiqued as an attempt to appropriate homosexuality into the frame of heterosexuality. Butch is a

lesbian with prominent masculine traits who follow the conventional masculine mode of dressing and behavioural pattern and plays the ‘male’ in a relationship. A femme, on the other hand, is the more feminine counterpart who copies the cisgender woman in her presentation of herself and plays the ‘woman’. Though critiqued for being essentialist, the butch-femme convention of lesbianism has a political edge to it. By imposing masculinity on a female body, the butch disrupts the conventions of binary. According to Butler, in the butch-femme culture prevalent in lesbianism conventional masculinity gets superimposed on the female body, and through this juxtaposition both ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ “lose their internal stability and distinctness from each other” (*Gender Trouble* 167). Butler states,

Within lesbian contexts, the “identification” with masculinity that appears as butch identity is not a simple assimilation of lesbianism back into the terms of heterosexuality.... this dissonant juxtaposition and the sexual tension that its transgression generates that constitute the object of desire. In other words, the object [and clearly, there is not just one] of lesbian-femme desire is neither some decontextualized female body nor a discrete yet superimposed masculine identity, but the destabilization of both terms as they come into erotic interplay. (*Gender Trouble* 167)

Susan Stryker agrees with Butler’s view and cites homosexuality as a mode of internal dissonance that subverts compulsory heterosexuality’s attempt to sustain gender binary. Stryker says, “The lesbian butch or femme both recall the heterosexual scene but simultaneously displace it. The idea that butch and femme are ‘replicas’ or ‘copies’ of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic power of their internal dissonance” (296). Homosexuality can thus function as a tool of political resistance against normative heterosexuality. At the same time, Butler does

not ignore the allegations against lesbian and gay subcultures that they redeploy the categories of sex. She refutes this allegation by stating that, the concepts of “queens, butches, femmes, girls, even the parodic reappropriation of dyke, queer, and fag” destabilize the categories of sex (*Gender Trouble* 168). As stated by Butler,

Only the array of embodied persons who are not engaged in a heterosexual relationship within the confines of the family which takes reproduction to be the end or telos of sexuality are, in effect, actively contesting the categories of sex or, at least, not in compliance with the normative presuppositions and purposes of that set of categories. (*Gender Trouble* 166)

Bornstein’s membership in the lesbian community is subversive and anti-essentialist in this sense. She further complicates this by refusing to succumb to the alleged inclination within the butch-femme tradition to endorse the redeployment of heterosexuality. She rejects the idea of “respectable queerness” in favour of a more authentic and honest connection with herself. She refuses to conform to the norms of heteronormativity. Just like her ambivalent androgynous gender identity, her sexuality and sex roles also defy the expectations of both homosexuality and heterosexuality. Her sexual orientation is an ever-fluctuating ever-evolving attribute of her identity that moves from being a butch lesbian to that of a femme or from being heterosexual to homosexual.

Though she identifies herself as a transsexual lesbian, she does not hide her experiences that prove her otherwise sexual orientation. Assigned male at birth, Bornstein getting sexually attracted to women and deriving pleasure out of this attraction appears to be heterosexual orientation. But this seemingly heterosexual attraction gets deconstructed and reconfigured the moment Bornstein comes up with the statement that “as soon as I could feel myself to be the girl in the pictures, I’d

come” (Bornstein, *Queer* 20). Bornstein here employs an interesting subversion of the heterosexual practice by stating that the source of her pleasure is imagining herself to be the woman to whom she gets attracted. Bornstein thus confounds the readers with the truth of her sexuality. As per the medical norm, a pre-transitioned trans woman must feel aversion to sex and if at all she feels attracted it should be to a man to satisfy the norms of heterosexuality. Heterosexual orientation was thus treated as a direct and valid manifestation of one’s sex-gender congruence and affiliation in the cissexist world depended on this. Thus, a transsexual desiring to be treated as a “real man” or a “real woman” was expected to be heterosexual in his/her sexual orientation to authenticate his/her position in the heterosexual matrix as legit and deserving.

Bornstein boldly rejects these norms of transnormativity and identifies herself as a ‘dyke’ lesbian with a girlfriend in the “Prologue” of her memoir. A ‘dyke’ as per the lesbian culture is a masculine or androgynous lesbian. According to Richard A. Spears, “In general slang various forms of ‘dyke’ and those words which are related to it range from a generic term for a mannish woman to the toughest, most masculine variety of lesbian” (318). Within the lesbian community, the word ‘butch’ is used to refer to a masculine lesbian. They regarded dyke as a slur, a term of oppression used in a derogatory sense. It is only recently lesbians started embracing the ‘dyke’ identity as a mode of protest and reaffirmation. But Bornstein reappropriated the term as a way of self-assertion as well as a means to register her protest against the attempts to reappropriate homosexuality within the heterosexual matrix.

Though self-identified as a woman, Bornstein does not negate the masculine traits in her sexuality. She refuses to fake femininity as is expected by the conventional discourse on transsexuality. She then proceeds to make a “full disclosure” and says, “I’m a sadomasochist. I enjoy mixing up pleasure and pain

I've been a cutter since I was a teenager" (Bornstein, *Queer* x). Sadomasochism is a practice disowned by lesbian subculture to promote the politics of respectability. Bornstein thus at the very outset of her memoir negates the norms of sexuality endorsed not just by heteronormativity, but even those of transnormativity as well as homonormativity. Bornstein also displaces the body or genitalia as the source of sexual pleasure. For her, self-inflicted pain is orgasmic, "genitalia has nothing to do with it" (*Queer* xi). By displacing body or specifically genitalia as the source of orgasmic pleasure Bornstein challenges the veracity of the early trans life narrative's claim of their body, which they repelled before transition, metamorphosing to a source of erotic pleasure after the attainment of the right kind of genitalia post medical transition. Rejecting all the mandates of heterosexual culture for according the status of real man/woman to a trans, Bornstein says, "I have secured myself a place as a sublebrity in the pantheon of America's queer and postmodern subcultures. That makes me happy" (*Queer* xv). The use of the word 'sublebrity', which is a blend of 'sub' and 'celebrity' used to refer to someone who is a celebrity of a lesser status, to describe herself gains political dimensions as it distinguishes Bornstein from the early trans women who by imbibing the values of heteronormativity had gained celebrity status in America's popular culture. Bornstein refuses to be a celebrity trans woman in the way most of her predecessors were.

Bornstein sums up the paradoxical nature of her sexuality with her comment that "the mainstream lesbian community didn't want anything to do with me because (a) I was transsexual (b) I had a boyfriend (c) I was a sadomasochist. Even the sadomasochist dykes in the city steered clear of me because I played with pointy things and I wanted them to draw my blood" (Bornstein, *Queer* 209). Bornstein thus transcends all the known modes of sexuality. She is not accepted in the community of

transsexuals because she is a lesbian. The lesbian subculture rejected her because she was not a “real woman” and she had a boyfriend. Her interest in sadomasochism also made her unacceptable there (Bornstein, *Queer* 189). Bornstein’s allegiance to lesbianism has a confrontational edge to it as she transgressed the practices prevalent there. Her politics of transgression is evident in her response to being introduced to a gathering of lesbians by Lula and Sailor. She says, “Femmes tittered. Butches guffawed. I reddened” (Bornstein, *Queer* 223). With her refusal to be identified as either the butch or the femme, Bornstein conveys the transgressive politics of her desire that defies all established norms of sexuality. She identifies herself as one whose gender identities and sexual desires are “fluid not fixed expressions of life” (Bornstein, *Queer* 227). Finally, Bornstein found her happiness in the “mind-boggling paradox of pleasurable consensual slavery” (Bornstein, *Queer* 209), a form of desire different from the “usual hetero-homo scene of the world” (Bornstein, *Queer* 215). With the femme Lula and the butch Sailor, Bornstein became her true self and embraced her sexuality that transgressed all the limits of imposed binary.

Throughout the narrative, Bornstein appears to be fluctuating between the norms of conventional homosexuality and heterosexuality, thus, embracing a seemingly bisexual orientation. Bornstein challenges the norm of fixity attributed to these conventions by brilliantly subverting the norms. For the heteronormative society, Bornstein with her pre-transitioned male body having a relationship with a cisgender woman was the ideal form of heterosexuality. But for Bornstein, being the woman she is, that becomes the manifestation of her true sexuality which is homosexual orientation. What appears to be a heterosexual orientation to the world outside becomes a manifestation of homosexual desire for Bornstein.

In all her three marriages with cisgender women, Molly, Becky, and Janis,

Bornstein played the role of the submissive partner. Thus, Bornstein overturns the traditional gender roles where men are seen as dominant and women as submissive within the context of marriage and challenges the efficacy of marriage as a cultural apparatus to safeguard the purity of heterosexuality. To further the process of subversion, Bornstein redefines her sexual engagement with men as an instance of lesbianism in light of Bornstein's self-identification as a woman. She accomplishes this by creatively attributing a butch lesbian identity to the men she was intimate with. Through such constant role reversals in sexuality, Bornstein challenges the discourse of heterosexuality. Bornstein's father's insistence that Bornstein should prove her "masculinity" is symbolic of the societal pressure to conform to the norm. To meet this purpose Bornstein's father sets up a meeting with a prostitute to initiate Bornstein into the world of conventional masculinity. Having been forced to prove her "masculinity" through successful intercourse with a woman is indicative of the prejudice of the heteronormative culture that binds gender with sexuality.

One's sexual preference is perceived as a source of legitimization for one's gender identity. The warning Bornstein received from her father just before her forced meeting with the prostitute was "Have a ball son" (Bornstein, *Queer* 22). But once Bornstein lies to her father about her successful initiation to conventional manhood after the meeting with the woman, her father's attitude changes from one of warning to that of compliment. The father proudly says, "That's my man!" (Bornstein, *Queer* 22). This shift from warning to appreciation is indicative of the father's acceptance of his 'son' as an 'able' heterosexual cisgender male. Though Bornstein did not have had sex with the woman and they parted with a hug "like sisters", it was the facade of being conventionally masculine that gained her father's acceptance. Such conflicts and experiences encountered by people of variant sexualities had no place in earlier

trans life narratives because by ‘default’ they were all ‘asexual’ until their medical transition. Post-transition, they became undoubtedly heterosexuals. The whole medical discourse on transsexuality was constructed on the false premise of heterosexuality as the natural and the only valid mode of human desire.

Bornstein, immediately after recollecting her failure to engage in sex with the woman arranged for her by her father, narrates her “real first time” with another woman Candy (Bornstein, *Queer* 24). As per convention, a male-to-female transsexual is expected to be attracted to a man to legitimize her gender identity. Bornstein negates this and confuses the readers with her fluctuating modes of desire. In the next chapter of her memoir, Bornstein describes her fascination for Tommy Warnes, one of her schoolmates who was a “tough guy short for a boy” who haunted Bornstein’s “erotic dreams” (Bornstein, *Queer* 31). In her fantasies, she wanted to have sex with Tommy and imagined him to be her “baby butch dyke” (Bornstein, *Queer* 31). Bornstein’s lesbian fantasies had not just women but men whom she imagined to be women. Bornstein even says, “I wanted to fuck him. And since I really couldn’t do that, I wanted to be him” (Bornstein, *Queer* 32). This is again quite unconventional for a pre-transitioned male-to-female trans to openly admit her desire to be like another man as it could hinder her wish to undergo medical transition by putting her claims to womanhood in doubt. Bornstein’s homosexual orientation provided her the much needed reaffirmation of her femininity. Bornstein proudly declares “I fell in love with every woman I had sex with” (*Queer* 34). For her, the gender and sex of the object of her desire did not affect her identity as a woman. At times she even imagined herself to be the lover of some “sad, closeted gay men” (Bornstein, *Queer* 34-35), who, based on Bornstein’s male body, assumed that she is a gay man, with whom she had sex and felt orgasmic.

Bornstein was not ready to suppress her sexual orientation to validate her gender identity. Her gender and sexuality transgressed the conventions of heteronormativity. She compares herself to the characters of the Sci-Fi comic books she had read as a child. “Men who were magically or technologically turned into women, women who rightly assumed themselves to be men, alien races that have more than two genders, otherworldly sexual adventurers” (Bornstein, *Queer* 41). As per the diagnosis made by her father’s friend, Uncle Jay, the Psychiatrist, she was an ‘artist’. Bornstein further explains the connotations of this diagnosis by stating that in her family “artist was another word for beatnik and/or homosexual” (*Queer* 41).

Early trans women let the world judge their authenticity as women based on their ability to please men in heterosexual relationships. But for Bornstein, “sex was still less about me having an orgasm and more about how on earth could I please a woman?” (*Queer* 68). Bornstein, at the same time, reveals her “homosexual temptations” to “very handsome guys-the kind of butch gay men who’ve always been able to make me feel like woman” (Bornstein, *Queer* 68). She used her male body to please other gay men by imagining herself as the femme pleasing the butch gay. Thus, for Bornstein, the biological sex or gender identity of the person with whom she had sex did not decide her pleasure. She was a lesbian using her male body and assigned masculine gender to please other women. This pleasure made her reaffirm her femininity. By identifying herself with the woman she was having sex with and by deriving lesbian pleasure out of a seemingly heterosexual relationship, Bornstein reconceptualized the norms of heterosexuality to homosexuality. She challenged the norms of heterosexuality and the presumed link among sex, gender, and sexuality through the manipulation of the subversive multiplicity of her desire.

Bornstein never tried to claim allegiance to heterosexuality to prove the

‘truth’ of her gender. Neither does she negate any of her pleasure derived out of heterosexuality before her medical transition. Instead, she employs an interesting reversal where in her desire and attraction for women and the pleasure gained through it becomes the testimony of the lesbian spirit in her ‘masculine exterior.’ Referring to her relationship with Mariam, her colleague and a member of the church of Scientology, Bornstein says, “She was a woman I wanted to fuck. We loved each other like puppies” (*Queer* 88). Mariam’s perception of Bornstein as a man did not hinder the manifestation of Bornstein’s desire. For Bornstein sexual desire and gratification defies all the boundaries of sex and gender.

Bornstein also provides a critique of how religion and capitalism prioritized heterosexuality as a way to control and contain human sexuality and thereby human population. Scientology, the cult religious movement Bornstein had followed, defined “sex, marriage, and children as a vector along which all beings survive, a unit that generates more power than the sum of its parts” (Bornstein, *Queer* 94). Scientology prohibited homosexuality as it failed to generate more human power through procreation. For the members of Scientology, sexuality was regulated within the heteronormative space of marriage between members of the opposite sex. It was the duty of the members of the cult to “marry optimally, so we’d generate more power” (Bornstein, *Queer* 94). Bornstein’s marriage with Molly was optimal from the perspective of religion and the conventions of heterosexuality. An optimal marriage was one that deployed sexuality for the purpose of procreation. Bornstein showed no aversion to this marriage. As per convention, a trans woman is expected to oppose such a marriage. Instead, Bornstein challenged the conventions by exchanging the “cultural rules of gender” (Bornstein, *Queer* 94).

Bornstein was happy to be the femme in her make belief lesbian tie with

Molly. Bornstein even felt that she “was a man and maybe that wasn’t such a bad thing after all” after a few weeks of getting married to Molly” (Bornstein, *Queer* 94). This statement has a confrontational edge to it. As per the medical discourse, true transsexuality was defined as a perpetual hatred of the sex and gender one was assigned at birth and a desperate desire to transition to the preferred sex and gender. All the early narratives on transsexuality followed this dictate without fail. But Bornstein, who identified as a woman, felt happy as a man while playing the ‘husband’ in a conventional heterosexual marriage. Bornstein openly admits her shifting sexual desires and fantasies without being concerned about the public sanction of her transsexuality as true. After the birth of their daughter, Bornstein and Molly started drifting apart emotionally and sexually because “they found each other unattractive” not because of Bornstein’s apparent gender-sex incongruence. At the same time, Bornstein says, “I loved my way through relationships with four other women in the nearly two years Molly was gone. . . . With each woman, I could play at being a real family man” (Bornstein, *Queer* 123).

Bornstein was happy in her second marriage with Becky as she could live with Becky like a “pair of sisters” that made her “feel girl enough and happy” (*Queer* 137). Bornstein thus reverses the age-old norm of marriage as a safe keeper of heterosexuality. When the early narratives celebrated their post-transition heterosexuality as the incontrovertible evidence of their gender identity, Bornstein felt her gender in its irrefutable certainty when she placed herself within the verboten zone of homosexuality. Bornstein thus not only negates heterosexuality as the crux of cisgender identity but also normalizes homosexuality as a valid form of human desire by removing the stigma attached to it. Even as a lesbian, Bornstein questioned the conventional norms of sexuality as a direct manifestation of one’s corporeality by

being a lesbian in a male body.

Bornstein complicates her brand of lesbianism further by making love to Ruby, a young drag queen. They were both male biologically. But disregarding the truth of their body, they both identified themselves as women and hence described their bond in lesbian terms. (Bornstein, *Queer* 154). Thus, Bornstein breaks not only the conventions of heterosexuality but even those of homosexuality. Towards the end of her narrative, Bornstein, after falling in love with Lula, the femme lesbian of the sadomasochist couple, confesses how her life has been a fight against the conventions of sexuality. She had always thought of herself as a femme lesbian and thinking it normal for a femme to be attracted to a butch, she found herself falling in love with Sailor. But it took her time to understand that her love for Sailor, the butch lesbian, was her attempt to conform to the norms of the respectability politics of sexual minorities where they attempted to redeploy the norms of heterosexuality to homosexuality. Bornstein comments,

Back when I began to focus on my journey as a transsexual, my first aha moment was the realization that I'd brought into a cultural mandate that real women only love men. I broke that rule and I went through with my gender change to become a femme lesbian And by golly, I'd immediately fallen into a similar trap: I believed and blindly obeyed the subcultural mandate that real femmes only loved butches! (*Queer* 228)

Bornstein exposes the reappropriation of heterosexist norms into lesbian subcultures to attain social sanction. She denounces that and declares to the world that each one has his/her own way of expressing desire. There is no universal frame of sexuality applicable to all.

Bornstein's relationship with Catherine who later transitioned gender and

became David is also reflective of Bornstein's subversive approach to the essentialist norms of sexuality. Bornstein and Catherine were girlfriends for three and a half years. After Catherine's transition to David, Bornstein had no difficulty in accepting him as her "boyfriend." Bornstein defines herself as "not man, not woman, but rather both and neither" (Bornstein, *Queer* 197). She carries the same fluidity to her sexuality too. Both Bornstein and Catherine were at the crossroads of gender and their sexualities too defied all the norms of conformist definitions. Bornstein's statement "We had sex being girls, we had sex being boys. We were boys and girls at random" (*Queer* 190) strikes at the very root of fixity and innateness attributed to the manifestations of human desire. They both enjoyed being the dominating (top) and the submissive (bottom) ones and thus challenged the norms of sexual orientation propagated as part of disseminating the notions of homosexual as well as heterosexual normativity.

Bornstein thus defies all the mandates of "normal sexuality" and projects sexuality as a continuum that shifts polarities. Bornstein laughs at the absurdity of the heterosexual discourse's attempts to fix individuals into strict categories of gender and sexuality. She laughs at the paradox that she calls her life. She states, "I was now a lesbian with a boyfriend, but I wasn't a real lesbian, and he wasn't a real boy-so did that make us a heterosexual couple the other way round? Don't talk to me about paradoxes" (Bornstein, *Queer* 203). Bornstein suggests a ground of compromise for her ambivalent position in both transsexual and lesbian communities. According to both norms, she was neither an ideal trans woman nor an ideal lesbian. Bornstein hence decides to embrace a "transsexual lesbian" identity, a category just like "working class lesbian" with no bearing on one's gender or sex (Bornstein, *Queer* 186).

Bornstein's memoir brilliantly exposes the heterosexist agenda of the medical discourse on transsexuality and the early narratives' blind conformism to the sexual objectification of trans women. The medical discourse on transsexuality resulted in the reductionism of women to the parts of their body. The beneficiaries of this discourse complied with this. The medical transition of a man to woman in this regard was nothing but the refashioning of the male body to that of an "ideal female body" capable of catering to patriarchal needs. A major concern of all pre-operative transsexuals before their transition as per the early narratives and medical discourse on transsexuality is the size, shape, and functionality of their newly constructed genitalia. They all demanded a body that could function "normally" and "properly" to earn them a legit space in the heterosexual matrix as one capable of heterosexual intercourse. Doctors took exceptional care to ensure that the newly constructed vagina of a trans woman has enough depth for penile intercourse.

Thus, the whole discourse on the medical transition of transsexuals was based on the presumption of transsexuals as conventionally heterosexual. The imperative behind medical transition came to be understood as making one fit for heterosexual intercourse. Bornstein recalls the conversation she had with Dr. Stanley Biber who performed her transition surgery. During her final medical examination prior to surgery, the doctor suggested that she will not have "enough depth" after surgery due to the small size of her penis. The doctor recommended using two patches of her skin to add depth and sensitivity so that her newly constructed vagina is "deep enough for the average penis" (Bornstein, *Queer* 187). The doctor never asked about Bornstein's sexual orientation before making this observation. Instead, he made his remark based on his biased understanding of transsexualism. Transition surgery in this regard becomes an appurtenant of the heteronormative discourse on sex, gender, and desire.

Bornstein describes this awkward situation as being “trapped in a Vaudeville routine” (*Queer* 186). A Vaudeville is a theatrical performance that became popular as the first mass entertainment industry in the US during the early 20th century. It combined elements of burlesque, comedy, farce, dance, and music. Vaudeville being intricately connected to the industry of mass entertainment and obliged to cater to the demands of consumer satisfaction, it often projected women as sexual objects and as desirable commodities (Oberdeck 244). Andrew L. Erdman in his book, *Blue Vaudeville: Sex, Morals, and the Mass Marketing of Amusement, 1895-1915*, explains how Vaudeville performances resorted to and promoted the fetishization and objectification of the female body to meet the demands of consumer satisfaction. By comparing the medical discourse on transsexuality and its attempt to construct trans women with a body capable of heterosexual functionality, to a vaudeville routine, Bornstein challenges the reduction of trans woman to her body by this discourse. By demanding their bodies to be reconstructed to fit heterosexual expectations, the early trans women too became complicit in this objectification of transsexualism. Bornstein’s explicit negation of this discourse is evident in her rejection of the doctor’s suggestion. She retorts by saying “I don’t need that kind of depth I’m not going to be having any penile intercourse I’m a lesbian” (Bornstein, *Queer* 187). Thus, Bornstein successfully constructs a reverse discourse that shatters the heterosexist agenda of the medical discourse on transsexuality.

The conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation prevalent in the medical discourse on transsexuality has denied entry to many trans people whose sexual orientation did not match heterosexual expectations. As per this discourse, true transsexualism and homosexuality were mutually exclusive. Bornstein describes this mandate as her “final roadblock” to accepting her transsexuality. The “decades-old

quandary” that bothered Bornstein was “How could I be a woman if it was women that I loved?” (Bornstein, *Queer* 172). This question was a persistent concern, not only for Bornstein but for countless trans individuals who, influenced by the prevailing dominant discourse on gender and sexuality that blurred the lines between gender identity and sexual orientation, struggled to grasp that these two aspects of their identity are distinct, with no inherent overlap.

For Bornstein, the answer that worked was the distinction between gender and sexuality. She understood that a trans woman could be a lesbian just like a ciswoman. Homosexuality does not question the truth of a cisgendered person’s claimed gender identity. A ciswoman falling in love with another woman does not deprive her of her womanhood. But when a trans person displays homosexual orientation, it deprives him/her of their entitlement to their preferred gender identity. If a ciswoman can retain her identity as a woman despite being sexually attracted to another woman, it must be so for a trans woman too. Bornstein says, “On the hierarchy of gender in those days, lesbian was more of a real woman than transsexual-may be even a higher form of life just like straight women were more real women than lesbians” (*Queer* 173). Thus, the gender hierarchy had placed a trans lesbian at the bottom of the gender evolutionary ladder. Bornstein by claiming her identity as a transsexual lesbian and by normalizing the same topples down this hierarchy and reconceptualizes the oppressive norms employed by heterosexuality to subjugate trans.

Bornstein had to confront situations in life where her womanhood was questioned because of her sexuality. Her second wife Becky and her third wife Janis denied Bornstein’s claim of being a transsexual based on the ‘fact’ that they had “great sex” (Bornstein, *Queer* 158). This echoes the presumption of the whole discourse on transsexuality. Janis negates Bornstein’s transsexuality by stating that

“you are not a transsexual You’re a Jewish momma’s boy” and describes Bornstein’s femininity as a reflection of her mother fixation (Bornstein, *Queer* 156-157). They misappropriate the woman in her as effeminate masculinity. Bornstein even had to struggle to convince her Psychiatrist Greg that she is a transsexual even though she had sex with men and enjoyed it. Bornstein’s statement “I like sex with guys. I just don’t want to live with them” (*Queer* 159) was interpreted by Greg as an expression of her homophobia. Bornstein’s unconventional sexuality earned her the label of being homophobic in the cisgender world while trans women described her as transphobic.

Jamison Green identifies himself as a heterosexual trans man. But he does not use his sexual orientation to advocate transnormativity. Green bravely recollects the various sexual encounters he had with gay men and bisexual and straight women before identifying his true pleasure and comfort in heterosexuality. Though he agrees to the fact that he was not comfortable being sexual with men before his transition, he does not hide his progressive bisexual orientation after his medical transition. According to him the reason for his reluctance to have sex with men before his surgery was not the fear of homosexuality, but visibility. He feared that being sexual with men will render the man inside him invisible. He says, “The underlying issue for me was always visibility-the fear that I was or would be invisible. I couldn’t be with a man while I had a female body because I assumed any man would always perceive me as a woman” (164). But post-transition, after he had “matured in a male body” he had no such apprehensions. Once he had established his agency and autonomy as a man in a visible male body, he was not afraid that his “identity as a man would be overwhelmed by that of a male partner” (Green 164). Transition gave him the confidence to explore his sexuality. Unlike the early trans life narratives’ claim of

their heterosexuality as the immediate and natural outcome of their transition, Green states that he dated several people irrespective of their gender before identifying his orientation as heterosexual. He says, “I dated- and had sex with- gay men and bisexual and straight women; all terrific people and I’m very appreciative of the time and intimacy we shared” (164). By being honest about his sexual explorations to identify his post-transition sexual orientation, Green subverts and erects a counter-discourse to the early transnormative life narratives. According to Green “Ultimately these varied experiences prepared me to recognize the qualities I wanted in the person I would ask to spend the rest of my life with me-who turned out to be a woman” (165). Green’s memoir thus effectively resists the promotion of transnormativism evident in early trans life narratives.

While Bornstein used her memoir to protest the stigma attached to homosexuality among trans, Jamison Green questions the mainstream misappropriation of transsexuality as an attempt made by gender-variant people to reconfigure their homosexuality as heterosexuality to gain heteronormative validation to their desire. Green shatters the stereotype of a transsexual as “simply homosexuals who cannot accept their own homosexuality, so they beg doctors to make them “normal” (Green 41). Green blames the medical discourse on transsexuality that further endorsed this stereotype. Citing Sandy Stone, Green states that many doctors functioned under the presumption that all female-to-male transsexuals were attracted to women and “they were afraid to be homosexual.” They wanted to subject themselves to sex reassignment because “they were homophobic and couldn’t accept themselves as lesbians” (Green 46). Green explains the paradox involved in a clinical setting thus:

In a clinical setting, a trans man desperate to be allowed to transition tries to

express his “normal” sexuality by asserting his attraction to women and denying that he is a lesbian. Yes, he’s telling the truth from the perspective of his gender identity. But what the doctors hear is filtered through their own belief that the body tells us who we are, and this trans man in front of them wants to change his body so he can change the abhorrent nature of his lesbian sexuality. These clinicians don’t understand that it isn’t necessarily his sexuality that is abhorrent to him. Even if this patient fell in love with a man, it wouldn’t necessarily change his relationship to his own body: In his own self-perception he might then be homosexual after all, even if his body were still female and the body of his partner were male. That wouldn’t necessarily change his need to transition. (166)

He also discusses how the reformulation of transsexuality as homosexuality forced many trans people to identify themselves as gays or lesbians to escape the prevalent transphobia. Green’s memoir discusses at length the adverse impacts of reading “a transgender childhood as a lesbian childhood (or gay one as the case may be)” (Green 12). This wrong interpretation of a child’s transgender identification as “pre-homosexual behaviour” leads parents to send them to psychiatric intervention to prevent the child from developing homosexual attachments (Green 14). According to Green this pattern of reaction is the result of the cultural conflation of sexuality and gender. Many gender-variant people self-identified themselves as homosexuals expecting social validation in the lesbian-gay communities (Green 13). Same misappropriation and desire of social validation led Green to identify himself as a lesbian prior to his understanding of his gender variance and the resultant medical transition. Unlike the early narrators, Green does not hide this phase of lesbian identification in his life. Instead, his narrative offers an honest discussion of his

relationship with Samantha, his lesbian partner, who left Green after his transition.

Green displaces sex and gender as decisive attributes of one's sexuality. He states,

...not all transpeople are erotically attracted to people of their same natal genital configuration, which is one reason why it is confusing for transgender kids when other people react to transgender expression with homophobic violence. It's also why many transgendered kids are, like I was, tempted to take on those homophobic projections and identify as gay or lesbian. (13)

Though Green's first sexual encounter was with a heterosexual woman, who despite of Green's female body was attracted by his masculinity, by the time he finished his graduate school, he came to the essentialist conclusion that he must be a lesbian.

Green's reasoning that led to this conclusion reflects the cultural conformism and the forced integration and the resultant invisibility of transgendered person. Green says, "I had determined that since I had a female body and I was attracted to female-bodied people I must be a lesbian" (17). But once he joined the lesbian community, he was rejected by other lesbians because of the degree of his masculinity. It was a time when the lesbian community was largely questioning and rejecting the terms of respectability politics and refusing to deploy the equations of heterosexuality into the realm of homosexual desires. Since "it was becoming less fashionable for lesbians to appear to mimic traditional gender roles" (Green 17) Green with his evident masculinity became unfit in the lesbian subculture. He says, "While most of the women I grew close to were at first drawn to me by something I can think of only as gendered attraction, after a time they would begin to chafe against what felt to them like being with a man, or at least another of the boyfriends (or husbands) they were trying to leave behind" (Green 17).

Thus, the societal compulsion to define his gender variance as homosexual attraction forced him to live in denial of his gender identity. But this imposed lesbian identity became an existential concern for Green once he became a parent through donor insemination with his partner Samantha who was a lesbian. Though Green felt like his daughter's father, the conformist understanding of Green as a woman because of his female body and his relationship with Samantha made it impossible for him to claim fatherhood. Even Samantha understood their relationship as existing "outside of both conventional lesbian and heterosexual contexts" (Green 20). For Green, the man, his seemingly lesbian relationship with Samantha felt like a heterosexual orientation. But for a culture that relied on sex and gender to define desire, Green was a homosexual. This is one of the reasons that finally encouraged Green to undergo medical transition to claim his manhood. Post-transition, Samantha rejected Green and his maleness because she identified herself as lesbian. (Green 25)

Green critiques the practice of assuming an individual's sexual orientation by looking at his/her sex and gender expression. Green admonishes the heterosexist presumption of a male with feminine gender attributes as gay or a female with masculine performativity as a butch lesbian. He says, "You simply can't tell by looking at someone what his or her sexual orientation is And if a woman is attractive and seems feminine to you... it doesn't mean she is attracted to men, or even she thinks of herself as a woman" (8). Green resists the conservative system of considering one's sexuality as an offshoot of gender identity. He opines,

I don't think there is anything wrong with experiencing and acknowledging erotic or romantic emotional attraction to other people regardless of their sex or gender. To me, the qualities of a healthy sexual relationship-attraction, caring, mutual respect and pleasure- are not exclusive to particular

combinations of sexes and genders. (13)

Green resists the homogenization of human desire. He defines the varied manifestations of human desires like homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality as individual choices which should not be the yardstick to authenticate one's gender identity. Green says, "Gender and our presumptions about gender and sex and sexual behaviour affect everyone, but not everyone has the same ideas about sex, gender, or sexuality" (82). Green identifies himself as a heterosexual trans man. But he does not approve of the idea that all transsexuals should comply with the norms of heterosexuality. Green also narrates the attempts he had made to establish an alliance between lesbian, gay, bisexual minorities and transgender communities since he felt that the oppression and marginalization confronted by the LGBT communities emanate from the insistence on heteronormativity. Green states that LGB communities' understanding of their oppression to be related to sexual orientation and that of the transgender communities to do with gender identity is baseless. The heteronormative society conflates gender and desire. For them, homosexual expression of desire is also about the "violation of gender norms" (Green 79) just as transsexualism is wrongly interpreted as an indication of one's desire to escape the stigma of homosexuality. Hence, instead of promoting transnormativity of earlier narratives, Green advocated an alliance with LGB communities "since so much of the oppression and violence experienced by trans people were a result of the perceived link between transness and homosexuality" (Green 78).

Green also takes up the issue of the non-inclusion of trans lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in LGB communities because of the "prejudice against their transness" (Green 78). Green agrees that "homosexual orientation does not automatically render a person able to understand transgender issues or experience.

Nor does inclusion in GLB contexts mean that all transgender or transsexual people welcome that inclusion or make use of it” (Green 81). While arguing for trans inclusion in sexual minority communities, Green also recognized the bias straight trans people had towards trans people who were homosexuals. He states that “straight trans people would need to learn to be less homophobic (and gay trans people less defensively superior and cliquish)” (Green 156). Green thus imagined a social structure where everyone will be free to express their sexual orientation without taboo or stigma irrespective of being cisgender/ transgender or heterosexual/homosexual. By advocating trans inclusion in LGB communities and mutual alliance between lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, Green is promoting an ideological shift in the earlier modes of transgender activism that promoted heteronormativity. Green postulates an eradication of heteronormative bias and heterosexism endorsed by early trans narratives.

Green recalls his association with Lou Sullivan, one of the pioneer trans men to publicly identify as gay as a source of inspiration that significantly influenced his perspectives on trans sexuality. Green was an active member of the FTM support group FTM International founded by Sullivan and after Sullivan’s death inherited the leadership of the same. Green remembers how most of the trans men attending the FTM International get-togethers claimed their heterosexual attraction to women and felt superior about the same. But the collective under Sullivan’s leadership never entertained such notions of superiority. Instead FTM International respected variety in human experience and human perspectives (Green 58). Inspired by Sullivan, Green also believed that “sexual orientation should not be a gating factor determining access to surgical transformation” (Green 59). By endorsing Sullivan’s postulate on the measure to improve the trans experience, Green reverses the entire

medical discourse on transsexuality that promoted transnormativism.

For Green gender validation based on sexual orientation is impossible since sexuality is mutable by nature. Green states “sexuality can change, but it cannot change from outside. It changes from within, and every person, gay, bi, or straight, is subject to the possibility of change in her or his sexual desire, response, or interest” (158). It is less known to the world because “we are too sheltered or too fearful and judgmental to discuss this” (Green 158). Human sexuality as an immutable attribute gained currency because “identity politics requires a stable identity.” Homosexuality needed this theory of stable sexuality to combat homophobia by arguing that “sexuality is an immutable characteristic: one is born with it, and it cannot be changed” (Green 158). Since the sexuality of transpeople was more fluid, they undermine this dictum and thus challenged the notion of stable sexuality that homosexual and heterosexual people equally endorsed. According to Green, this fluidity in terms of sexuality made the homosexual communities reluctant to include trans people. Transpeople had to be silenced.

But contrary to the fear of homosexual communities that transpeople will invalidate their existence, Green states that the trans experience, “by emphasizing the fact that we have no control over the nature of our sexuality”, will vouch for homosexual desires and thus can “validate civil rights for all LGBTIQ people” (158). What one can control is the expression of one’s sexuality not the nature or object of one’s desire. But instead of giving the right to decode the expression of one’s sexuality, the hegemonic discourse on heteronormativity constrained the same by limiting sexuality as a means to further procreation. It is this power dynamic that deemed homosexuality as deviant. Green states that “sexuality is rife with power dynamics” (160). In heterosexuality, it is the male with greater muscular strength,

who becomes the dominant, the one who penetrates. The woman who gets penetrated becomes the submissive. Thus, heterosexuality serves the purpose of establishing the heterosexual male at the top of the power hierarchy. But transsexual people, according to Green “personify the threat of uncertainty, of change and of unstable power dynamics” (Green 161). The sexuality of trans people attracts a lot of debates because of its potential to pose the “threat of sexual uncertainty” (Green 161) to the power dynamics of heteronormativity. According to Green, trans sexuality poses a threat not only to heterosexuality but also to homosexual subcultures. A femme lesbian is threatened by the presence of a trans man because they worry that their butch lesbian partners will see FTMs and “want to join them in becoming men” and butch lesbian feel threatened because they think that “their feminine partners will see FTMs and be more attracted to their testosterone-enhanced masculinity” (Green 161).

Though Green acknowledges the potential of trans sexuality to unsettle the power dynamics of conventional modes of human desire, he rejects the misconception that certain expressions of human desire will lead to gender incongruity or gender incongruity will result in shifts in human sexuality (Green 161). Irrespective of one’s gender identity, human sexuality is a mutable attribute of one’s identity. Instead of feeling threatened by it, Green suggests, “Learning about sexuality as a dimension of human experience and to understand ourselves does more to alleviate misunderstandings and eradicate the fear of difference than does hiding from sexuality or pretending it is not a factor in our lives” (Green 161-162).

Green repeatedly emphasizes the unnecessary focus on trans sexuality in the prevalent narratives on gender variant people. His attempt is to remind the perpetrators of such discourse that transgenderism is not about desire but about one’s gender identity. He opines, “Surgery is not what transsexualism is ultimately about.

Transsexualism is about life. It's about relationships, and not just intimate ones. Being a transsexual is not something we do in the privacy of our own bedrooms" (Green 89). Green's expressed desire to reframe the discursive focus of trans discourse back to gender from sexuality is a progressive gesture made towards the normalization of trans desire in its varied forms against the heteronormative imperative on heterosexuality as the valid expression of trans desire. He exhorts transpeople to rid themselves of "Anxiety concerning sexuality" to embrace their "most authentic self" they can possibly be (Green 216).

Jacob Tobia's narrative is more about their gender expeditions. Tobia's decision to focus less on their sexuality while discussing their gender itself is indicative of how they considered gender and sexuality as two separate entities. As discussed by Green in his memoir, Tobias's childhood was also one in which their effeminate gender performance was understood as a reflection of their homosexual orientation. Tobia, quite unaware of gender queerness also thought that their discomfort with the way they identified themselves will vanish once they come out as a gay. But it is only later that Tobia understood that their sexual orientation of being gay has nothing to do with redeeming their gender variance. To add to this, Tobia's gender non-binary/genderqueer identity came in conflict with their homosexual orientation.

In the introductory chapter of their memoir, Tobia recollects their first 'coming-out' at sixteen to their parents thinking that this will end the identity crisis they were experiencing. Tobia says, "I went downstairs on that rainy December night, gathered my parents around the kitchen island, and came out as gay" (2). Tobia, with the available information they had about the cause of their femininity, thought that this 'coming-out' will resolve their crisis. "After I came out as gay, I thought I was

done, that wrestling with my identity was a one-time thing. I'd publicly declared my identity, dealt with some rejection, and could move on" (Tobia 3). But later, when they heard their friends recollecting pleasant memories of their childhood, Tobia realized that they had no such memories. "Spasms of residual trauma" (Tobia 4) hit Tobia badly as he recognized their pain as different from that of effeminate men who are gay. Thus, at the very onset of the narrative, Tobia draws a line of distinction between their gender trauma and sexual orientation. The memoir focuses on Tobia's journey to come to terms with their gender. Later in the memoir, Tobia states how insufficient was the word 'gay' to describe the depth of their gender and sexuality. Tobia says, "Looking back, that word feels foolish, primitive, and imprecise. Looking back, I see how lacking the word gay was, how unprepared 'gay' was to hold the depths of my gender exploration. I could see that my ocean was something more, was something different. But I didn't have a word for it yet" (96).

At the same time, there are instances in the narrative that challenge and reverse the conventional narrative trope of early trans life narratives about sexuality. Just like Green and Bornstein, Tobia too recognizes their body as capable of erotic pleasure. The unconventional way Tobia recollects their first experience of sexual awakening makes the narrative counter discursive. It happened while Tobia went to his friend Nathaniel's house for a sleepover as a fifth grader. In Nathaniel's room, Tobia saw Nathaniel's sister's toy basket filled with Barbie dolls. As per the conventional transsexual narratives, Tobia, with their visible femininity, should have been fascinated by the Barbie dolls. But what caught Tobia's attention was a "totally naked Ken doll" which held them captivated for a while taking Tobia to the world of bodily pleasures. Tobia recollects how the naked body of the Ken doll attracted them. Tobia says "I paused, captivated. Something deep within me churned; inexplicably, I

was out of breath. I picked up the doll, slowly, carefully; I marvelled at his complete nakedness” (64). Tobia describes this incident as their “sexual awakening” (64).

Tobia’s male body experiencing sexual pleasure as a fifth grader despite their felt femininity runs contrary to the transnormative medical discourse. Tobia further negates this discourse by stating that all of a sudden, their femininity took a back seat, and it was their body and its erotic arousal at the sight of boys that thrilled them. Tobia interprets this as an indication of the way their body was changing under the impact of hormones, a natural phase of growing up. This is an experience that the early trans authors outrightly denied to prove the medical discourse on true transsexuality. Tobia, on the other hand, states that for the next three days, they had completely lost interest in Barbie dolls. Tobia recollects,

Where I’d spent so much of my childhood desperate to be able to dress Barbie up, a new desire had taken hold, one that supplanted my quest for sequins and tulle and ballerina skirts. My femininity and my gender issues took a back seat, because from there on out, it was about one thing and one thing only: boys, boys, boys. (65)

Unlike the early narratives, which would have interpreted this fascination for boys as the heterosexual orientation of the woman inside the male body, Tobia reads it as their homosexual awakening. They do not make any attempt to link their sexuality as an indication of their gender. Another fascinating reversal Tobia introduced in their narrative is that of the puberty myth. All the early trans life narratives spoke of the intense hatred they felt toward their body as they hit puberty. They considered puberty as something that destroyed the possibility of their body changing to their desired form. But Tobia enjoyed this phase as it allowed them to explore and experience their sexuality to the fullest. Instead of denying these

pleasures, Tobia remembers how at least for a short span of time, it helped them not to worry about their gender variance. Tobia says, “But to say that I begrudged my puberty as it was happening just wouldn’t be right. Honestly, I was way too busy being horny twenty-five hours a day, three-hundred-sixty-six days a year to even think about my gender identity” (67). Tobia thus, does not deny the sexual pleasure they could derive from their male body. Tobia says that testosterone had hit his body so hard that the “wind would blow and I would get an erection” (Tobia 67-68).

Puberty also gave Tobia access to the ‘forbidden’ literature on sexuality that their parents had hidden from them. They mention the 1988 edition of the book *Puberty, Puberty, Puberty, Puberty: For Boys* which their parents handed over to Tobia once they hit puberty. The discussion of the book in Tobia’s memoir serves the purpose of exposing the heterosexist conditioning prevalent in such literature on gender and sexuality. Tobia describes it as “the most scandalous book in our house” (70). When parents decided that it was time for Tobia to read the book, it was like “uncovering the Holy Grail”. It was Tobia’s “first blueprint of how human sexuality operated” (Tobia 72) which gave them scientific terms to describe the things they experienced. Tobia discusses at length how the discussion about sexuality in the book normalized heterosexuality. When heterosexuality was discussed as the norm, the sections on homosexuality and bisexuality were rife with indirect references to it being deemed abnormal, unnatural, unacceptable, immoral, and mental illness. A teenager attempting to learn about sexuality through such literature is initiated to the notions of taboo and stigma attached to human desire other than heterosexual orientation. Tobia states,

While the book does mention homosexuality in a non-stigmatizing way, it is represented as the exception to the rule, a type of attraction that is not the

norm and accordingly not worth spending much time on. . . . The entire book assumed that its reader was straight. While it told me that who I was sexually was natural and perhaps okay, it didn't really prepare me for what life was like as a gay person. (Tobia 73)

Tobia's discussion of this book, which gave them an insight into the nature of their sexual orientation, sheds light on how the heteronormative agenda of the hegemonic discourses on gender spread bias and prejudice against homosexuality and bisexuality. Tobia opines that the book's "silence about queer sex and queer lives was conspicuous and it completely failed to serve any purpose to young gender nonconforming trans kids." The book's silence about such aspects of gender and sexuality served to normalize the taboo attached to homosexuality, bisexuality, and gender variance. Tobia's statement that "Like much of the world in 2003 (and certainly in 1988 when the book was written) it was completely silent about trans and gender nonconforming people" (Tobia 73) is indicative of how even in 2003 when Tobia read the book, the world was stuck in its essentialist and conservative treatment of gender and sexuality that was predominant back in 1988. Tobia comments, "In the present, the book strikes me as not only outdated, but alienating. Reading it now, as a queer/trans adult, the subtext of the whole thing makes me cringe" (73). But Tobia feels happy that the book did help them as a young gay person to identify and come to terms with their sexual orientation. Tobia says, "I was no longer gay or queer, I was homosexual or bisexual. Everyone else (seemingly) was no longer straight, they were heterosexual" (73).

Apart from the "scientific discourse on sexuality" Tobia discusses how religion also functioned to safe keep heterosexuality as the norm. According to Tobia, "Retreats were the nexus of this sexual torture chamber" which plunged him into

“scenes of sexual confusion and frustration” (Tobia 74) forcing them to spend sleepless nights “resisting both the urge to masturbate and the urge to cry” (Tobia 75). Even at the age of twenty-seven, Tobia reveals that they are “still unlearning the shame and sexual erasure those retreats imposed on my adolescent body” (Tobia 75). Tobia also challenges the media stigmatization of homosexuals as “destroying the moral fabric of our society” and as “sinners who were gonna burn in hellfire” (Tobia 107). Tobia retorts in their typical sarcastic tone by stating that,

But I knew none of that was true. First off, I knew that global warming, wage disparity, war, racism, patriarchy, and corporate greed—not homosexuality—were to blame for the fraying moral fabric of our society. Second, I knew that all those dudes on TV who spent so much energy talking about how nasty homosexuals were either secretly wanted to get it on with other dudes or were just jealous of our innate ability to match fabrics. (107)

Though Tobia identified themselves as gay, throughout the narrative, Tobia projects the same ambivalence they had experienced with their gender to their sexual orientation too. The narrative begins with Tobia coming out to their parents as gay. But as the narrative progresses, Tobia’s understanding of their sexuality took new turns. For Tobia this identification with homosexuality “set in motion dual arcs of self-discovery and self-loathing.” Their attempt to understand the nature of their desire filled their heart with “dichotomous feelings of power and shame, beauty and repugnance, community and isolation, peace and despair” (Tobia 96-97). But at no juncture, Tobia considered embracing the conventions of heterosexuality to establish their “normalcy”. On the other hand, this ambivalence took them to new terrains of desire. At times they embrace bisexuality and at times thought of medically transitioning and becoming a lesbian so that they can be like Rachel Maddow, the first

openly lesbian American TV anchor at MSNBC who catered to Tobia's sexual fantasies. Tobia comments, "She's so handsome and dapper and cute and smart and I wanted to be like that (and also maybe transition and become a lesbian so I could marry her?)" (256).

The way Tobia presented their gender made it impossible for them to have a partner in the gay subculture. To be accepted as gay, they will have to compromise with their queer gender identity. Since Tobia was not ready for that, they were forced to live in profound sexual frustration (Tobia 109). But later Tobia's association with lesbian, gay, and queer communities gave them the confidence to tell people their truth that despite the queerness of their gender, they are gay. At the same time Tobia mocks the double standard of the heteronormative world where a homosexual is expected to "come out" by declaring his/her sexual orientation openly whereas no such demand is placed on heterosexually oriented people (Tobia 131). This compulsion to 'confess' is again another tool used by heteronormativity to stigmatize homosexuality. Tobia resists this in favour of their fluid sexuality. Being rejected by the established gay community in their urge to maintain the standards of respectability politics, Tobia shifts their sexual polarities to be open to bisexual and pansexual orientations. In their signature humorous tone, Tobia exposes the heteronormative agenda of normalising heterosexuality through the compulsory erasure of all the other expressions of human desire which forces gender-nonconforming people like Tobia to live in sexual deprivation and frustration. Tobia opines,

Gay boys won't touch you with a twenty-foot pole and you don't have the right equipment for straight guys, so you're stuck trying to find all the beautiful bi-/pansexual dudes out there", and even though, statistically speaking, millions and millions of people are bi/pan. bi erasure is real and

finding actual bi/pan guys on dating apps is really hard. So, you haven't gotten laid in a lot longer than you'd care to publicly admit. (310)

Thus, Tobia too treats sexuality as an evolving and fluctuating attribute and negates the earlier heteronormative projection of human desire as stable.

Meredith Talusan identifies as a nonbinary bisexual. She too recollects the stages of her life when she thought of herself as a gay and found refuge for her gender variance in homosexuality. But like Green was rejected by the lesbian subculture because of his masculinity, Talusan found it difficult to match the stereotype of gay because of her growing femininity. She was perceived as “being a not-so-hot guy and a woman” (Talusan 11) by the other members of the gay community. She “occupied liminal places in ... white-dominated Harvard gay society” (Talusan 12). Later, after embracing her gender variance and femininity, Talusan recognizes how intensely she had struggled to suppress her traits that were deemed undesirable in gay communities to fit in. She recollects with regret how she attempted to “butch it up” to attain the desirable “hypermasculinity” to belong within the gay subculture (Talusan 11-12). While living in the Philippines, Talusan thought it normal to live like a girl in a male body and still love another man. She thought she could be like Jembong, her grandmother's cousin's son, who was a ‘bakla’. But once she reached America, she found it excruciating to match the stereotypes of gay men that the American gay subculture preferred and promoted. She says,

the experience of being gay felt in some ways like belonging to a strict church. Feminine men in the gay community were relegated to such inferiority that I eventually couldn't stay, even though I belonged there in principle. It wasn't that I didn't resonate with being a gay man ... but it was the specific, masculinity-obsessed form gay male culture took in America that I eventually

couldn't tolerate. (32)

It was also difficult to lead a normal life in America's strict religious orthodoxy that deemed homosexuality a sin. She comments, "I ran far away from religion when I came out, especially the Catholic Church, which still deemed homosexuality a grave sin" (32). While in Harvard, she opted for the course "Topics in Gay Male Representation" thinking that it could guide her toward her path though she "really didn't have much choice if a gay man was who I planned to be" (Talusán 96). Talusan thus presents a sense of uncertainty about the nature of her sexuality which finally defies the binary of homo-hetero conflict and embraces a bisexual orientation. America and Harvard with their conservative hold on gender binary and heterosexuality totally changed Talusan's ideas about living in a country and studying in a university known for their progressive thoughts. She says,

Harvard wanted to make of me, someone who was supposed to think freely so that I could be ground breaking and innovative, yet also conform to whatever arbitrary standard the university decided I should meet. Harvard reminded me of a fickle father who encouraged you to break the rules, except you were never allowed to undermine his authority. (Talusán 45)

Talusán says with a tint of regret that she would have become another kind of person than who she is now, had she taken a decision not to join Harvard. She comments, "I could still be a gay man in a twenty-year relationship with the love of my life, no doubt married, maybe even with adopted children" (45) if she had opted to continue in the Philippines. She recollects with aversion the "stilted adjustments" she had made during her initial days in Harvard to fit in as a gay man in America. She says, "I had in my first year dutifully gone to the gym multiple times a week and had grown to adopt that knowing, ironic manner cool gay men were known for. I also saved my

work-study money to get my hair cut at a proper salon and found more colourful, stylish clothes” (41).

Talusan’s experience exposes and critiques the redeployment of heterosexist norms in homosexuality that made life difficult for feminine men like Talusan. It was impossible for Talusan to express her gender identity as a woman and her homosexual orientation simultaneously because they were considered mutually exclusive. In her desperation to belong, Talusan continued to suppress her femininity apart from the hidden and “mild gender experiments” (Talusan 113) of cross-dressing to satisfy the woman in her. In retrospect, she also critiques her own double standard that she adopted in her struggle to fit in. Though she used to denounce the American gay subculture’s insistence on desirability and masculinity in public, she did her best to suppress her femininity to appease and adopt these standards. Not knowing how to deal with her gender variance, she thought her best chance to belong would be to join the sexual minority. She recollects her life in America as follows;

I continued to maintain as masculine an image as I could muster, aware that my attractiveness depended on it. I was happy to decry the gay community’s overemphasis on desirability in discussions with other queer people, the problem with personal ads where men used “straight-acting” as a point of attractiveness, how terrible it was that “No fats, no femmes, no Asians” often appeared in those ads. But I also made the utmost effort to be as un-fat, un-femme, and un-Asian as possible. Un-fat was easy enough, and over time, un-Asian became habitual too. Un-femme was harder, but I found that my weekly outings at Liquid released my feminine energy and allowed me to be masculine enough the rest of the week without feeling unduly burdened.

(Talusan 43)

Talusan's attempts to fit in gained her a lover in Ralph. The kind of "settled gay coupledness" she enjoyed with Ralph and her desire to belong made her dismiss the idea of her womanhood as a "passing notion" ((Talusan 167). For a short span of time, her womanhood appeared to be "an absurd thing to want in the midst of my intense happiness, compared to the havoc it would wreak if I even entertained the idea of transition, a word whose meaning I didn't really have a frame of reference for" (Talusan 167). But at the same time, she often imagined herself to be the woman in her relationship with Ralph. Talusan says that though she did not particularly support gay marriage, the thought of marrying Ralph sounded desirable because it offered her the prospect of becoming the woman she desired to be. Ralph Wedgwood, her gay partner, belonged to the British aristocracy and was next in line for the title of Baron after his father's death. As his friends jokingly said, this would entitle Talusan to the title of "Lady Wedgwood." Talusan says, "how women who are married to baronets get the title of Lady, and so a man who marries a baronet should be called Lady too, my mind led me to the possibility of literally transforming into a woman" (166-169).

Talusan's desire to fit in thus forced her to live in denial of her gender identity for some time. But even while embracing the identity of a gay, Talusan exposed the attempts made by homosexuality to imbibe the norms and relationship patterns of heterosexuality. Later, with her decision to embrace her gender identity and her bisexual orientation without being concerned about social stigma, Talusan challenges all the conservative demands mainstream society had put on people who deviated from the norms of gender dichotomy and heterosexuality. Talusan opines, "Gender transition provided me with much greater freedom of expression, the ability to determine the forms of femininity I wanted to embody, instead of feeling like I had to negotiate every feminine accessory or mannerism with a strict gay church that

constantly threatened to reject me” (Talusán 109).

Unlike the early trans life narrators, Talusán is not concerned with proving her desire as heterosexual and stable. While being in a gay relationship with Ralph, Talusán does not hide her attraction to Richard Russel, a straight cisman she got to know through her friend Lenora. Talusán reveals, “I was attracted to Richard the way I was attracted to pretty much any good-looking straight man who crossed my path, a dynamic I’d gotten used to over the years, to “look but don’t touch,” (180) only because it will threaten her membership in the gay community. But at the same time Talusán bravely recollects situations where the woman in her longed to be “kissed” by Richard or where she longed for physical intimacy with Richard. She also narrates how she finally satisfied her longing for Richard by holding the work shirt Richard wore close to her nose and “smelled his skin beneath the vinegar scent of fixer” (Talusán 182). Thus, for Talusán, life was a swift juggle between her social role as a gay man and her dream life as a woman. She describes her desire as one where in “real love can coexist with the impossible love in my fantasies, where I am a woman who enraptures a man because he finds me enticing and beautiful” (Talusán 183).

Talusán’s feelings for Ralph were different from her love for Richard. Ralph pleased the man she was assigned at birth and her homosexual desires whereas her love for Richard was the manifestation of the woman whom Talusán carried inside who wanted to be with a man. She voices her bisexual and genderqueer spirit by stating, “I grew to accept the idea that I loved Ralph and Richard as different people, one as the person I was and the other as the person I could be but wasn’t, a twin spirit who lived inside me but had no permanent physical form” (Talusán 191). By being honest about her bisexual orientation, Talusán rejects all the conservative and essentialist demands imposed by heteronormative culture. Before her transition, there

were moments where she thought of transition as a means to gain Richard's love. She had thought "It would be better to have a vagina with Richard, then Richard and I could have a real life together" (Talusán 205). At the same time, she had also expected to make her femininity look more authentic by being with a straight cisman. She says, "Richard was the perfect prop. Despite being under dressed, he still conveyed the aura of a masculine, handsome, and normal heterosexual man, so having him on my arm was like a stamp that authenticated my womanhood" (209).

Talusán does not negate being influenced by these conformist thoughts that characterised trans experience in the past. But after her transition to a trans woman, quite contrary to the conventional expectations of her sticking to heterosexuality Talusán expanded the arena of her experiments with her sexuality. More than satisfying the societal pressures to fit in, what demanded her attention was the need to cater to her body and its pleasures. She says that following the rules of straight womanhood for over a decade could not make her happy. In her memoir, she boldly declares her dissatisfaction with following the norms of heterosexuality and denounces the same without being worried about societal approval of her womanhood based on that. She states,

May 2014, a month after I published my first article about being trans, I woke up at dawn between two naked men, on the top floor of a town house in Park Slope. I'd followed the rules of straight womanhood for over a decade, and it hadn't made me happy, so I wanted to test my boundaries, push myself to be with people in ways I hadn't before. That was when Barrett and Jason came along, a bisexual couple I met online who were interested in dating a woman. (Talusán 128)

Janet Mock identifies herself as a heterosexual trans woman. Her memoir

begins with her thoughts on her relationship with Aaron, a straight cisman who dated Mock without being aware of her transsexual identity. The narrative ends with Mock revealing her transsexuality and Aaron accepting her for who she is. Mock has dedicated the book to Aaron who “became home” (Mock 8) for Mock. The first chapter discusses the anxieties and fears that Mock underwent as she toyed with the idea of whether or not to come out as a transsexual to Aaron. Mock uncovers the internalized shame that every trans person has to deal with about their transness whenever they engage in intimate relationships. Not revealing their transsexuality is interpreted by the cissexist society as betrayal and revealing the same may end in them getting rejected. The accidental revelation of their transness can even lead to embarrassment as well as them being subjected to physical violence. Mock’s statement “Getting close meant intimacy, and intimacy meant revelations” (6) is suggestive of how trans in general felt threatened about the expression of their desire and intimate relationships. The narrative also gains significance as one dealing with the issue of sexual exploitation and objectification of trans women by the cissexist society.

Unlike Bornstein and Talusan, the other trans women chosen for the present study, Mock appears to be more akin to heterosexual conventions. Throughout the narrative, Mock consistently projects her heterosexual desire. She even aligns with the earlier narratives in her desire to reconstruct her body to make it heterosexually functional. Her specific queries to her surgeon Dr. C. about the maximum possible depth that her “very own” new vagina could attain and her question “Will I be able to have an orgasm” (Mock 229) are indicative of her desire to possess a body that will validate her identity as a “real woman” in a heterosexual relationship. She used her body to carve the attention and love that was always denied to her (Mock 172). Even

her childhood experience of being sexually abused by her stepbrother Derek gets interpreted by Mock as a validation of the “girl-child” inside of her (Mock 45). Though it took years for Mock to understand and label it as molestation and child sexual abuse, she agrees to the fact that Derek had “opened a door inside [of her] that could no longer just be shut” (Mock 44).

Mock honestly states that “Being sexually available was how I validated myself in a world that told me daily that who I was would never be ‘real’ ”(173). At the same time, Mock’s memoir gains resistive significance by frankly discussing the instances of sexual abuse that she was forced to confront because of her gender variance. She opines,

As a survivor of sexual abuse, I developed a belief system that shaped how I viewed myself: *I can gain attention through sexual acts; my worth lies in how good I can make someone else feel, even if that means I’m void of feelings: what I do in bed is shameful and secret, therefore I will remain in the dark, a constant shameful secret.* (46-47)

But being consistent about her sexuality and orientation before and after her medical transition, Mock deconstructs the medical notions about transsexual desire in her narrative. Her pre-transitioned body positively responded to sexual stimuli from cismen in the same fashion in which her post-transitioned body did. She also acknowledges deriving orgasmic pleasure through her penis though she hated it as a part of her body. Earlier narratives never voiced this enigmatic relationship they had with their genitalia. They only said that they hated it, but never spoke of the irony of being naturally led to derive pleasure from something that they hated. Hence, as mentioned earlier, the truth of penile pleasure was absent in all the early life narratives authored by trans women. But Mock voices this dilemma through which

she explodes the myth of low libido as a symptom of “true transsexuality” as claimed by early transsexuals. Mock honestly describes the conflict she experienced in her pre-transitioned body like this,

In the bathroom, I was forced to engage with my penis. It had to be cleaned and it wanted to be touched. The pleasure I’d give myself filled me with a combination of release and revulsion. I felt guilty for achieving gratification from a part that separated me from my personal vision of myself, and I felt despair because I didn’t have the means to change it. (Mock 138-139)

Just like Green, Mock also takes up the issue of the conflation of transsexual identification with homosexuality. The general presumption in this regard questioned the sexuality and gender not just of those who identified as trans but even of those who engaged in intimate relationships with trans. Except for Aaron who did not feel threatened about his manhood and heterosexuality, all the others who came close to Mock left her on knowing her transsexuality. Mock recollects her childhood experience with Junior, her neighbour who kissed Mock which awakened her to sexuality. But every time Junior enjoyed oral sex from Mock, “he made sure to point out that he wasn’t gay because he didn’t do it back” (Mock 48). As kids, they were taught to hate homosexuality and consider gay as an identity that weakened their masculinity. But in Mock’s reasoning, there was nothing homosexual about her relationship with Junior, since they both saw Mock as a girl in that sexual play and “there was nothing gay about girls sleeping with boys” (Mock 49). On another occasion, when Mock revealed her transsexuality to her boyfriend Adrian, he immediately rejected her stating that “I’m not like that. I’m not gay” (Mock 160). Mock’s father also misunderstood her femininity as an expression of her homosexuality (Mock 79). His reasoning for his belief echoes the common

misunderstanding of the link between gender and sexuality. According to her father, “*My son is an effeminate boy pretending to be a girl in front of other boys, so he must be gay*” (Mock 80). But Mock knew that she does not fit within that category of gay.

According to her,

I knew I was viewed as a boy, I knew I liked boys, I knew I felt like a girl.

Like many young trans people. I hadn't learned terms like trans, transgender, or transsexual- definitions that would have offered me clarity about my gender identity. For example, a trans girl who is assigned male at birth and attracted to boys may call herself gay for a short time-a transitional identity on her road to self-discovery. In actuality, though, since her gender identity is that of a girl, and she is attracted to boys, then her sexual orientation mirrors that of a heterosexual girl, not a gay man. (Mock 80)

Though Mock was not sure whether ‘gay’ was the right fit for her (Mock 79), she came out to her family as gay when she was thirteen since she failed to understand and explain who she was due to the conflation of gender identity and sexuality. What prompted her to do so was the air of acceptance at home that she felt regarding her alleged homosexuality. Mock says that “for many parents, having a gay or lesbian child is a lot less daunting than having a trans child, especially in a culture where gay and lesbian people are increasingly becoming more accepted, whereas transgender people, especially trans women are still stigmatized” (Mock 80). Mock’s observation elucidates the gender oppression and stigmatization gender variant people had to experience in a heterosexist social structure. They were also subjected to the non-consensual labelling of their sexual orientation as homosexuality disregarding the truth of their felt gender identity. Mock opines that “gender and gender identity, sex and sexual orientation are spheres of self-discovery that overlap and relate but are not

one and the same.... Our sexual orientation has to do with whom we get into bed *with*, while our gender identity has to do with whom we get into bed *as*” (Mock 50). Mock critiques the stigmatization and discrimination of trans people in the name of their sexual orientation. She states that there is “no formula when it comes to gender and sexuality” and instead of ignoring diversity in gender and sexuality based on rigid and conservative norms, people should be given “freedom and resources to define, determine, and declare who they are” (Mock 50).

All these writers honestly recollect the various turns their sexuality took in the course of their development and coming to terms with their transness. All of them encountered a phase of ambiguity regarding their sexuality. The incongruity between their assigned sex and their preferred gender expression often gained them the title of being homosexuals. Before coming to terms with their gender identity and sexuality, their desire manifested itself in homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual orientations. By being honest about all these transitional phases of their sexual orientation, these writers establish the shifting and evolving nature of human desire as against the norm of fixity that heteronormativity had attached to desire. These writers reformulate all the gendered equations of human sexuality that maintained heterosexuality as the norm and the preferred mode of human desire. Unlike their predecessors who chose to be silent about matters related to their desire other than the norm, to attain their gender identity, these writers are vocal about their desire. By voicing the nuances of their desire without being concerned about how it will affect their gender realization, these writers resist and reverse the politics of assimilation that the earlier trans life narratives had propagated.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The genre of life narratives plays a pivotal role in identity formation. When adopted as a means of resistance by an oppressed group of people, it attains greater significance. Trans life narratives thus are laden with the political purpose of reversing the existing hegemonic discourse on gender identity that declared all gender and sexual minorities as deviants. In the beginning, trans life narratives displayed gender essentialist and conformist tendencies with regard to the process of gender identity formation. But with the advent of the 21st century trans life narratives took an ideological turn and entrusted themselves with the responsibility of constructing an alternative narrative capable of challenging and subverting the hegemonic discourse of heteronormativism and biological essentialism.

The currently available research on trans life-narratives has exposed the heteronormative bias evident in the 20th century trans life narratives. Accordingly, critics like Leslie Feinberg, Sandy Stone, Bernice Hausman, Judith Shapiro, Julia Serano, Jack Halberstam, Kate Bornstein, Viviane K Namaste, and others demanded a reconceptualization of the narrative tropes prevalent in early trans life narratives in such a way that it employs the subversive potential of transpeople and their histories to challenge gender dichotomy. Sandy Stone urged trans people to embrace a posttranssexualist ideology which will offer a reverse discourse worthy of unsettling the binary view of gender. Stone wanted trans people to reclaim their agency to decide their gender and sexual preferences over the rigid social expectations and norms associated with gender roles. Though a critique of the essentialist tone of early American trans life narratives is available, research regarding the extent to which contemporary American trans life narratives question and reverse this is sparse. Hence

the present study has attempted to analyse the manifold ways employed by the select 21st century American trans life narratives to challenge the essentialist norms of gender, body, and sexuality to reverse heteronormativity and transnormativity of earlier trans life narratives.

The study investigated the subversive narrative modes adopted by the 21st century trans life narrators Jamison Green, Janet Mock, Kate Bornstein, Jacob Tobia, and Meredith Talusan. Their life narratives become tools of resistance used to confront the potential threat of becoming monolithic accounts of individuals by stating the experiential pluralities of transgenders as a community. The major objective was to assess the efficacy of their memoirs as reverse discourses capable of challenging the transnormative narratives of the previous century. The research also probed deep into the politics of exclusion encompassed in the earlier trans narratives which established the white upper-class transsexual as the authentic trans. The study analysed the political significance of trans life narratives in forming transgender politics and its modes of resistance. To materialize these objectives the study investigated the polemics of resistance offered by the select trans life narratives against biological essentialism, gender stereotyping and heterosexuality.

The 21st century witnessed the emergence of trans identities who presented themselves as transgressive gender identities in their life narratives as opposed to the medically constructed transsexuals. They challenged the cultural and ideological production of gender in a given cultural context. Kate Bornstein, Jamison Green, Janet Mock, Jacob Tobia, and Meredith Talusan foreground the ambiguity and fluidity of sex and gender through their life narratives as opposed to the promotion of the hegemonic and oppressive system of gender found in early narratives. Replacing the usual migrating stories of their ancestors, these writers presented transcending

stories of gender. Their reconceptualization of the interrelatedness of bodily identity and gender made the mainstream cultural construction of gender available to subcultural reinterpretations and subversions. This thesis analysed the numerous factors contributing to this paradigm shift and the reformulations of sex, gender role and identity and sexuality that established the select 21st century trans life narratives as revisionary and posttranssexual. The thesis is divided into seven chapters including an introduction, four core chapters, a conclusion, and a recommendation for further study.

The introductory chapter of this thesis “Historical Dialogues: The Emergence of Trans Identity Discourse” attempted to offer a historical survey of the origin, development, and scope of transgender studies as an established mode of academic discourse in America. The chapter analysed a range of factors that contributed to the reconceptualization of ‘transgender’ from one who crosses from one gender to the other to one who transcends the limits of gender binary. The chapter presented the topic of this research and discussed the rationale behind analysing the select 21st century American trans life narratives to validate their potential as a revisionary and subversive mode of discourse on gender.

Gender and sexuality always had a prominent role to play in structuring and controlling human societies. Transgender studies is an interdisciplinary field of academic inquiry that gained momentum during the 1990s after the publication of Sandy Stone’s essay “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto” which was first published in the year 1991. Stone’s essay demanded a reconfiguration of the ideological underpinnings of the medical construction of the identity “transsexual.” The term “transsexual” refers to people who cross from one gender to the other through the medical alteration of their body. Stone conceived “transsexual” as a

restrictive category that forced people who changed sex to be silent or manipulative about their subjective histories to gain access to medical and legal sanction of their felt gender identity. She wanted the transsexual to stop being conformist and use their refigured body and gender variance to disrupt the norms of heteronormativity and “reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries” (Stone 296). Recognizing the role played by trans life narratives in the production and dissemination of the kind of trans identity that gained popularity during the second half of the 20th century in America, Stone offered a critique of the restrictive and gender essentialist narrative archetypes of the then available popular trans life narratives. Instead, she urged all gender variant people to use their personal histories to constitute a counter-discourse to the oppressive and hegemonic discourse of gender dichotomy and biological essentialism.

Under the aegis of modern capitalist Western ideologies, gender dichotomy and heterosexuality became the norm during the late 18th and 19th centuries. Gender expressions outside the binary, which were once acknowledged and respected as valid modes of self-expression by various indigenous cultures, came to be treated as deviations from the norm in need of state intervention and regulation. The 19th century thus brought people with gender variance under strict state surveillance. Initially, gender and sexuality were treated as synonymous; hence homosexuals and transgender people were grouped together as deviants. But the early decades of the 20th century witnessed a flurry of publications that differentiated between sexual orientation and gender identity. Studies offered by Robert Stoller, John Money and Ralph Greenson established sex as biological and gender as social. Further studies in this area severed the link between gender and sexual orientation. The publication of *The Transsexual Phenomenon* by Dr. Harry Benjamin in 1966 further revolutionized

trans identity construction by providing the medical model of transsexuality which resulted in the pathologization of gender variance and provided people with gender variance a way to deal with their cross-gender identification. But gradually this medical model of transsexuality started functioning as the gatekeeper of gender dichotomy and heteronormativity.

But the last decade of the 20th century witnessed a few pathbreaking publications that questioned this gatekeeper model of transsexuality propagated by medical science and revolutionized the notion of gender. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is the most prominent one among them. Sandy Stone's essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" reconceptualized transsexuals as outside the gender boundary. It made a clarion call of change when Stone asked transsexuals to own their histories and write their stories to refute the stories engineered by the medical professionals and hegemonic gender discourse rooted in dichotomy.

The 1990s also witnessed the publication of Leslie Feinberg's trailblazing ideas in his works, "Transgender Liberation: A Movement whose Time has Come" which popularized the term "transgender" as an umbrella term to include gender variant people in 1992 and *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* in 1993 which documented the presence of gender variant people in varied cultures and ethnicities. Feinberg's autofiction *Stone Butch Blues* published in 1993 is known for its outlandish depiction of gender ambiguity against the gender distinctive identity promoted by the earlier trans autobiographies. Imbibing inspiration from such paradigm shifts, Kate Bornstein came up with the revolutionary amalgam of the memories of her life and her theoretical deliberations on trans in her memoir *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* which altogether negated the stereotypical gender portrayals of the earlier texts in favour of the rest of humanity

who are neither masculine nor feminine. Apart from these academic discourses, the genre of writing that contributed the most towards the emergence of transgender politics was the publication of transsexual autobiographies that gained momentum from the 1950s onwards. Following the publication of Christine Jorgensen's autobiography, many trans women came up with their autobiographies. This trend took momentum in the 21st century when more and more trans people came up with their stories of gender exploration. Gradually the transgender emerged as a distinctive entity as opposed to the essentialist transsexual. By the 1990s' transgender studies detached itself from queer politics and developed into an autonomous body of academic inquiry into the politics of gender identity formation. The introductory chapter of this thesis thus historically situates the formation of transgender studies during the late 20th and 21st centuries.

The second chapter of this thesis "Narrating the Trans Self: Contextualising Early Trans Life Narratives" analyzed the gender essentialist and transnormative tone of the early trans life narratives and traced the major events that led to the emergence of the posttranssexual approach to trans identity formation and trans activism that characterized the 21st century. The second chapter offered a critique of the early trans life narratives by exposing the predominance of the wrong body model, their adherence to gender stereotypes and the normalization of heterosexuality in those narratives. This chapter aimed at analysing the portrayal of transsexual memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency in these narratives based on Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's theorizations of the autobiographical self as well as Sandy Stone's postulates on the need for a posttranssexual paradigm shift.

The chapter also discussed the factors that contributed to the emergence of the medical model of transsexuality and its impact on the formation of trans identity

during the late 19th and 20th centuries. The analysis took into consideration the popular transsexual narratives produced from the 1950s up to the 21st century with special focus on *Christine Jorgenson: A Personal Autobiography* by Christine Jorgensen and *Second Serve: The Renee Richards Story* by Renee Richards. The canonical trans life narratives of the 20th century gave currency to the essentialist view of gender as a byproduct of one's body. Hence, they promoted medical transition to realign their bodies to match their gender preference and obeyed the medical discourse on transsexuality that maintained gender variance as a psychopathological condition in need of a medical fix. These writers also adhered to the medical demand for passing after physical transition by negating their past to gain cisgender status. They succumbed to the cissexist societal pressure to conform to the norms of heteronormativity so that they can live a 'normal' life as 'real man or 'real woman'. All these popular narratives were written by upper-class white trans women. Thus, the canon of the early trans life narratives largely remained exclusionary with no representation from culturally, racially, and economically underprivileged trans communities. As stated by Sandy Stone, the authors of the early trans life narratives blindly emulated the dictates laid down by the medical discourse on transsexuality under the hope of entering the realm of cissexist privilege. Abiding by the prevalent discourse on sex and gender, body became the locus of gendered identity in these narratives. The gender identity constructed in these life narratives was one in conformity with the essentialist and dichotomous discourse on gender that oppressed people who were outside the binary. They made deliberate omissions and manipulations of their memory and experience to match the criteria laid down by the medical discourse spearheaded by Dr. Harry Benjamin and his Standards of Care. This medical discourse created pressure on gender variant people to conform to

societal expectations of heterosexuality and gender norms to gain access to medical transition of their body so that they can realign their bodies to fit their felt gender identity. This pressure also forced gender variant people to hide or lie about their sexual orientation and gender identity, causing feelings of shame, self-doubt, and isolation. They yielded their agency to the gatekeepers of transsexuality and ended up being passive imitators of heteronormativity and failed in generating a counter-discourse.

For a trans person who intends on passing as the other gender, holding on to the stereotypical performative attributes of gender becomes the foremost concern. Transsexual/ transgender identities hold the potential to deny gender as natural, invariant, and immutable. They are capable of constructing a counter-discourse to defy gender binary and gender stereotyping. But in practice, their adherence to gender essentialism reproduced this natural attitude to gender. To gain the status of “real man” / real woman”, these writers emulated the culturally accepted codes of gender dichotomy. A reading of the early trans life narratives divulges this truth. Instead of producing a counter-discourse, those narratives ended up reinvigorating the cultural codes of gender binary to gain social acceptance. As per the conventions of medical discourse on transpeople, one who experiences cross gender identification must undergo medical transition and after the surgery, he/she should disappear into the cisgender population negating the past. Erasure of one’s past contributed to the promotion of gender dichotomy in earlier trans life narratives.

Gender transcending can happen mainly at three levels that contribute to the construction of a reverse discourse on trans identity construction. They are sex (the physical attributes), gender (the cultural and social attributes) and sexuality. The writers chosen for the present study can be seen as transcending these three levels at

varying degrees. The third, fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis discussed the posttranssexual modes of depicting body, gender role and sexuality in the select 21st century American trans life narratives. The most obvious transcending happens with respect to the way they disregard, negate, and challenge the gender attributes and roles assigned to each gender within the binary.

Third chapter of this research “Man, Woman, and Trans: Transcending Gender Binary and Stereotyping attempted an analysis of the extent to which the select trans life narratives succeeded in negating the gender stereotypes. In the initial conceptualizations of the concept ‘transgender’, the prefix ‘trans’ signified transformation or crossing from one sex-gender category to the other. But after the 1990s, the terms largely meant going beyond or through genders echoing the paradigm shift that took place in trans discourses. The writers chosen for the present study resisted gender stereotyping by transcending the binary codes of femininity and masculinity. Even those who biologically migrated from one sex to the other refused to abide by the norms of the two-gender system. This negation of gender binary is evident on different levels of their existence from the kind of clothes they wear to the multifarious ways in which they carry out their day-to-day interactions with society to defy binary. By not falling victim to the promised world of cissexual privilege and by negating the cissexual entitlement, these authors redefine the notion of “real” gender as that one feels inside, not the one that conforms to the dictates of gender binary. They negate the idea of a single objective truth concerning gender and embrace the notion of gender as variant and multiple. These writers shattered the idea of gender as an immutable and innate attribute of an individual’s self. Instead, they propagated the concept of gender as a culturally constructed act that relies on the structured repetition of the same for sustenance as stated by Judith Butler.

All these writers questioned the biological base of gender and actively resisted nonconsensual gender attribution practised by the heteronormative society. Kate Bornstein, and Meredith Talusan though medically transitioned, refused to abide by the gender performance culturally attributed to the feminine gender. Unlike her predecessors who claimed membership in their preferred gender as man or woman post-transition, Bornstein flaunted an androgynous gender identity and described herself as neither man nor woman. Meredith Talusan, though initially going through a phase of struggle to match the gender expectations of the society later understood the absurdity of this struggle and gave up her attempts in favour of an androgynous identity. Jamison Green and Janet Mock did transition physically. Though they identified themselves within the binary as man and woman respectively, they did not prioritize this as the norm like their predecessors. Green and Mock vehemently critiqued the tendency of the cisgendered world of attributing gender based on the externally available cultural codes of gender. Green rejected these gender stereotypes and advocated the restoration of individual agency and lived experience over the theories of gender identity. Jacob Tobia's gender queer self-expression unsettles the cissexist society's sense of security and stability founded on the myth of binary gender categorization. All these writers offered a critique of the social system that made it look mandatory for a trans to belong to any one of the gender categories offered by gender binary to become legitimate. These narratives subverted the stereotypical depictions of the transgender as crossing from one gender to the other. Instead, they propagated the poststructuralist notion of gender as fluid and ever evolving. All these authors acknowledged the multivocality of gender as it was exercised in indigenous cultures and thus rejects the Eurocentric doctrine of gender dichotomy. Through their outlandish rejection of gender stereotypes, these writers

redefined transgender from one who crosses from one gender to the other to those who transcend the boundaries of gender.

These narratives thus offer a vantage point to revisit and critique the unidirectional approach to gender found in early trans life narratives. Even those who resorted to body migration to ensure the materiality of their existence in their preferred gender rejected the categorization in favour of gender plurality. The remarkable aspect of these life narratives is a bold rejection of “passing”. A trans person by publicly coming out as a trans in whatever variant form-transgender, transsexual, transvestite or genderqueer- is emphasizing on gender transgression. The writers of the early trans life narratives too came out as transsexual in their autobiographies. But by reiterating and blindly conforming to the cultural cues of gender to convince society of their unambiguous gender status after medical transition, they reinscribed the norms of gender binary. The authors chosen for the present study provided an alternative ideology to approach gender that prioritizes the subjective connection one feels with one’s gender and boldly challenged the dominant ideology prevalent on gender. These authors have taken upon themselves the responsibility to write back the hitherto ignored histories of those trans people who occupied a space of liminality outside the privileged upper-class white European transsexuals into the canon of trans life narratives.

The cultural, racial, and economic marginalization that augmented the gender subjugation experienced by these gender outcastes are exposed by the narratives offered by Mock and Talusan. The underrepresentation, as well as misrepresentation of gender nonconforming community, is brought to public scrutiny by Tobia’s exploration of the self. Rejecting the binary and exposing the follies of gender stereotyping became the predominant narrative strategy of the contemporary trans life

narrative. While the life writings of the previous trans authors reiterated the established cultural cues of being a man or woman, the authors of the later generations used their trans identity to resist the binary. While earlier authors obeyed the dictates of heteronormativity to authenticate their gender as “real” to themselves, to others, and to society, the authors chosen for the present study prefer self-validation of their gender. They are of the opinion that pertaining to one’s gender, more than the validation that comes from cisgender conformity, being real to oneself is important.

In addition to subverting the binary equations of gender, these narratives reconfigure the conventions of gendered embodiment through their life narratives. The fourth chapter of this thesis “Becoming Trans: Body as a Site of Contestation” studied the rejection as well as the strategic deployment of the conventional “wrong body” narrative of the earlier trans life writings by the select writers in their memoirs. By negating or by reappropriating the wrong body model of trans life narratives, the authors chosen for the present study erected a counter-discourse to the essentialist narratives of the former century. Sandy Stone and Bernice Hausman critiqued the earlier trans autobiographies for being closed texts that established physical intersexuality as the cause for their transsexualism. Thus, they foreclosed the chances of a different interpretation that would challenge the medical model of transsexuality. These narratives propagated the essentialist notion that an individual’s ability to experience his/her gender in unambiguous ways relies on the possession of the “right body” since the body decides an individual’s gender identity. Gender remained to be treated as a byproduct of a rightly sexed body. This overt claim about physiology as the origin of gender identity reiterated the hegemonic discourse on gender binary.

The trans life narratives selected for the present study followed the strategy of being honest about their relationship with their bodies before and after the physical

transition. Except for Jacob Tobia, the other four authors Jamison Green, Janet Mock, Kate Bornstein, and Meredith Talusan had undergone medical transition of their bodies to realize their gender identity. Instead of reiterating the expected move from gender dysphoria to gender euphoria in their preferred bodies which would entitle them to a rightful entry to the cisgender world, Green, Mock, Bornstein, and Talusan narrated how they still felt different. The attainment of preferred anatomy does make them happy, but it does not make them forget or deliberately override their transness. The early trans discourse referred to sex reassignment as a corrective measure which will fix their problem and allow them re-entry into the cisgender social frame. Instead of using the reversive potential of transition to unsettle the foundations of biologism, they resorted to it to reinstate the same. The contemporary trans autobiographers on the contrary posited transition to challenge the biological base of gender identity to challenge the notion of body as the container of gender signification.

Bornstein, Green, Mock, and Talusan challenged the canonical image of a “complete being” that a trans supposedly becomes after body transition by structuring their narrative as discontinuous, fragmentary, and open-ended. In the 21st century trans accounts the subjective, linear, and normative narrative pattern of the earlier texts gives way to an autobiography material that is fluid, polyvocal and a blend of genres. The centrality offered to the surgery has been replaced in these texts in favour of the actual lived experience. The process of transition, change, and becoming is projected in the post-surgical phase of narration instead of the sense of permanence concerning material embodiment, gender identity and happiness that usually mark the description of the post-surgery life in the canonical narratives. Instead of becoming man or woman, the attempt is to become visible as an individual of gender and body autonomy. The passing of earlier texts boldly gets replaced by an urge for visibility

without negating their transness.

All these writers discuss transition within the context of an individual's need and his/her lived experience. In their perspective, transition as such is never bad or hegemonic. But it can become so if transsexuals promote passing as cisgender post-transition. Contemporary trans life narrators promote visibility as a means to politicize transition so that it becomes subversive and political. By the post-transition negation of the quality of "realness" with which early autobiographers identified themselves, these writers refuse to be categorized as cisgender. These writers have taken on their shoulders the task of "Redefining Realness" (Mock). They narrate the process of not becoming a man/woman but that of becoming visible man or woman. They repeatedly declare that there is no one right way to be a trans and acknowledge diversity with respect to gendered embodiment. The authenticity of the claims made by early autobiographers of becoming real men or women or becoming whole beings is widely challenged and questioned by these writers.

All these writers reject the trans people's claim that they become real men or women physically and psychologically after transition only because they modified their bodies to match the expected appearance of a male/female. Thus, they invalidate the role of body as a mark of gender identification both for cisgender and for trans people alike. The body ceases to be the decisive factor in their gender scheme. In conventional narratives, the body became the focal point. The narrative documented their unidirectional journey from the wrong body to the right body to reach the destination of their preferred gender. But for the writers chosen for this study, transition becomes a continuous process, and the body is one of the many ways in which they try to materialize their subjectivity.

Jacob Tobia critiqued the universalization of the conventional transition

stories as the authentic trans narrative in their memoir. Tobia critiqued the transnormative ideology propagated through such narratives and rejected the wrong body narrative trope in favour of a truthful and subjective account of one's lived experience. For Tobia, body does not dictate one's gender. They never had any aversion to their body and never found it difficult to feel feminine in their male body. The male/masculine, female/feminine gender equation had no role to play in Tobia's gender cartography. For Tobia, their felt womanhood in their male body became a means of resistance and revolt against biological essentialism that promoted one body-one gender notion of heteronormativity. Instead of disciplining one's body into predictable categories intending them to mirror and validate the gender-sex binary by passing for a cisgender after surgery, the writers of contemporary trans life narratives use their transitioned as well as non-transitioned bodies as a medium of resistance.

The fifth chapter of the current research "The Trans Desire: Revisionary Notions of Trans Sexuality" investigated the treatment trans sexuality in the life narratives of the chosen authors. Just like the "rightly sexed body", heterosexual orientation was also considered as decisive in granting cisgender status to people with gender variance. The hegemonic discourse on gender privileged heterosexuality as the norm. A transgender individual seeking membership in heteronormative social structure promoted heterosexuality as the societal norm. Sandy Stone's essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" discussed the normalization and prioritization of heterosexuality adopted by the early trans life narrators as a way to establish themselves as "normally" gendered. In their eagerness to follow the mandates put forth by Dr. Harry Benjamin's Standard of Care, the early writers mostly lied about the true nature of their pre-transition sexual orientation. After transition, they all claimed to be naturally attracted to the opposite sex and gender as

is expected of an individual after undergoing medical treatment for gender variance. But the trans authors chosen for the present study challenged this adherence shown by their predecessors on heterosexuality to prove their gender claims as true. Instead, these narratives fulfilled the ideological function of proving one's sense of self as independent of one's body and desire. These writers set out to prove that just like the cisgender population, trans people's attitudes towards sexuality can vary. They can be heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, or asexuals based on their subjective preferences. One's sexual orientation has no bearing on his/her gender identity. The way one expresses one's sexuality does not authenticate one's gender identity.

Unlike their predecessors, these writers did not yield to the societal pressure to prove their gender identity by following the conventions of heterosexuality. They bravely experimented with their sexualities and ventured to defy the dictates of the medical discourse on gender which declared heterosexuality as the only legit mode of desire for a true transgender. Kate Bornstein transcended all such dictates and openly declared herself as a transsexual lesbian in her narrative. Jamison Green and Meredith Talusan are bisexual, and Jacob Tobia identified themselves as gay and bisexual. Janet Mock is a heterosexual, but she does not endorse heterosexuality as the norm. These writers normalized diverse sexual orientations in their memoirs. By being vocal about their desires other than the heterosexual ones, these authors challenged the transnormative rendering of the early life narratives offered by their predecessors. Unlike the early life narrators, the select 21st century authors did not hide or lie about their sexuality before transition. All the canonical narratives observed silence regarding their physical desires before their transition because according to Dr. Benjamin's Standards of Care, a true transsexual was mostly asexual before his/her transition. The authors chosen for the present study unveiled the heteronormative

agenda of safeguarding heterosexuality as the only legit mode of human desire by questioning the veracity of the claims made by the early authors about their sexuality. Thus, these life narratives offer a critical engagement with the existing modes of sexual practices and sexual identities with the aim of offering a reverse discourse to dismantle the transnormative narratives of the 20th century. Just like body and gender identity, these authors conceived sexual orientation also as mutable and flexible. They honestly traced the various phases in the evolution of their sexuality in their memoirs without being concerned of the damage it might do to their gender claims in a social structure that validated the authenticity of one's gender identity based on sexual orientation. By disregarding the stigma attached to homosexuality, these authors challenged the modern Eurocentric surveillance of human sexuality which restricted sexuality to the purpose of procreation within the institution of marriage as a means to control population. These narratives successfully reinstated the trans agency in exercising his/her desire the way he/she wanted without being reduced to mere imitators of heteronormativity. These narratives thus testify to the reversive potential of trans memoirs to unsettle the dynamics of power enjoyed by heterosexuality as the only licit mode of human desire.

Unlike the classical stories of migration, the life narratives of Kate Bornstein, Jamison Greene, Janet Mock, Jacob Tobia, and Meredith Talusan are representatives of the emergence of a new gender order envisaged to unsettle the gender binary. There is a post-structuralist reconceptualization of biological essentialism, gender identity and role as well as sexuality that can be seen in these texts that intend to do away with the imposition of heteronormative binary oppositions on individuals. These are transcending stories of transgenering that fundamentally redefined the essence of trans identity by subverting or going beyond the binary divisions of gendered self,

body, and performativity. The blind adherence to transnormativity found in the 20th-century trans life narratives gets replaced by voices of resistance and subversion in these select 21st century narratives. These writers are “transcenders”, who “seek precisely for a personal and political transcending of the laws of the binary itself” (Ekins and King, *Transgender Phenomenon* 183). This move resulted in a shift from the earlier identity politics found in trans discourse to ‘trans activism against gender oppression’ (Ekins and King, *Transgender Phenomenon* 184). The widespread influence of postmodernism and the advent of queer theory in the 1990s’ contributed much towards this paradigm shift.

All these authors propagate the idea of gender as a spectrum. For all these writers, the journey, not the outcome, makes sense in their life. It is not being real in a particular sex-gender category that made their journey remarkable but becoming better versions of themselves. For them, transition is not a move from one static point to the other, foreclosing possibilities of exploring life in better ways. It is the process of becoming, changing, and evolving that adds meaning to their transition. Instead of using their transitioned body to hide themselves, they used the same to challenge the notions of sex and gender as stable and unidirectional. Challenging heteronormativity entails recognizing and questioning the postulates, and prejudices that privilege heterosexuality and binary gender roles. It necessitates the construction of spaces that are inclusive and tolerant of differences, promotes equal rights, and a willingness to embrace diverse sexual orientations and gender identities as valid and licit modes of self-expression. The trans life narratives chosen for the current research thus envisaged a posttranssexual phase of trans identity politics and trans activism intend on the creation of a society that will respect and celebrate the full spectrum of human sexuality and gender expression.

Chapter VII

Recommendations

The present study envisages increased academic attention on the process of trans identity construction through self-narratives happening in cultures and geographies far and wide. Since the emergence of a posttranssexual discourse happened within the context of an analysis of the 20th century American trans life narratives, this study focussed on the select 21st century American trans life narratives. But the relevance of the study can be extended to other nationalities to evaluate the impact of this counter-discursive practice on trans identity politics elsewhere. The speculations and analysis provided in this research thus can contribute to furthering research on the diverse ways in which trans identity politics is getting shaped and reshaped in the 21st century. The following are a few recommendations for further study made based on the findings of the present study:

1. The homogenizing tendencies of the academia with regard to trans identity construction should give way to research that cater to the diversity of transgender experiences. As suggested by Sandy Stone in her posttranssexual ideology, the subjective history of every trans should be duly recognized and validated as a means to embrace and respect the diverse range of experiences within the trans community.
2. Since the posttranssexual discourse emerged within the context of an analysis of the 20th century American trans life narratives, this study focussed on the select 21st century American trans life narratives. However, the relevance of the study can be extended to other nationalities to evaluate the impact of this counter-discursive practice on trans identity politics elsewhere.

3. The medicalization of transgender identities still holds sway in discourses related to trans experience. This study would recommend higher level research to examine the contemporary relevance of medical discourse on transsexuality. Efforts should be made to expose the heterosexist bias of the medicalized view of transgender experiences that prioritizes medical interventions as the only way to deal with gender variance.
4. The research can be extended to understand the politics of representation of trans people in the available cinematic adaptations of the trans life narratives.
5. Research can be extended to understand the intersectional dimensions of trans identity construction to promote more inclusive understanding of the transgender beyond the binarist understanding of gender and to foster trans inclusivity beyond historical, social, cultural, racial, political, and economic considerations.
6. Research to investigate the notable absence of Transgender Studies and trans life narratives within school curricula can be done, particularly in nations like India where deep-seated biases and prejudices concerning the trans community still persist.
7. Advanced research can be done to understand the undercurrents existing between gender minority and sexual minority communities. The continuing ideological differences and debates between transgender studies and queer studies can be addressed for a better understanding of both.

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