



Strategic Acceptance of Queer Sexuality: A Critique

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Abstract

Queer sexuality and gender fluidity threaten the domination of heteronormative power structures. Gender fluidity dismantles the argument that gender is innately a binary structure, and reinstates that it is only an integration of performative acts. Once individual bodies start to experiment with gender fluidity, they shatter the manipulative control social institutions exercise over them. This is a drastic shift in power positions, as it uproots the hegemony associated with social institutions, such as family, marriage, and the economy. A pragmatically possible response to this manipulative encroachment of the individual body is to strategically undertake queer identity and present how gender performance is a personal choice of identity, rather than a pre-assigned norm. Jacob Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming of-Gender Story* and Billy Porter's *Unprotected: A Memoir* are two autobiographical accounts that boldly narrate their journey of self-doubt, acceptance, anger, retaliation, and proclamation to the world that gender binarity is a social and cultural construct, and that experimentation with gender fluidity should be a guilt-free personal liberty. Through these two autobiographical texts, this study investigates how body politics operate as a strategic tool for cis-conditioning. It also explores how queer sexual expressions reaffirm gender performance. Further, this study investigates whether strategic acknowledgement of gender fluidity is a possible response to heteronormative body politics. Finally, it discusses the scope of affirmative body politics, which is less authoritarian in nature and designed for individual advancement and better life.

Keywords: Body Politics, Gender fluidity, Gender Performance, Homophobia, Queer Sexuality.

Introduction

The history of queer struggles for legal acceptance and equality in America dates back to the early 1900s, when Henry Gerber founded The Society for Human Rights in Chicago in 1924, the first recorded gay rights organization in American history. In 1950, a Senate report titled "Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government" was circulated among members of Congress, resulting in the "lavender scare," during which over 4,380 gay and lesbian employees were fired from their government jobs. In 1952, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) classified homosexuality as a mental disorder. Ten years later, in 1962, Illinois became the first US state to repeal sodomy laws. The first American gay pride march occurred on 28 June 1970 when thousands of LGBTQ community members marched to Central Park. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders, marking a significant milestone in their struggle for

equality. Despite this, their fight for full equality continued for several years and partially culminated in 2000, when Vermont became the first US state to legalize civil unions and partnerships between same-sex couples. Ultimately, in 2015, the US Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage across all 50 states, bringing an end to the long legal battle for queer rights in America. Despite these legal victories, the gay community in America continues to face challenges in freeing their bodies from the restrictive heteronormative agenda, which seeks to marginalize them from all social spheres (1).

The Anthropology of Biopolitics notes, biopolitics is a complicated concept that has been used and developed in social theory since Michel Foucault, to examine the strategies and mechanisms through which human life processes are managed under regimes of authority over knowledge, power, and the processes of subjectivities (2). This political manipulation of individual was long unnoticed as

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heteronormativity was indisputably accepted as the norm. Unlike sovereign powers, which can end life, biopower regulates life, making it more insidious. These covert forces have shaped human life to maintain heteronormative power hierarchies within a normalized society. K S Kristensen writes, "When life itself becomes an object of politics, this has consequences for the foundations, tools, and goals of political action. No one saw more clearly this shift in the nature of politics than Michel Foucault" (3).

Body politics primarily reinforces cis-conditioning. The human body is not disciplined through force, but through ideological manipulation by various social institutions, presenting their structure as the only norm. This manipulation is often seen as a natural outcome of human sexuality, but it consciously categorises the population into a binary structure to maintain power agendas. These internalised ideas about human sexuality obscure the possibility of gender fluidity. The notion that gender is a spectrum, conflicts with body politics, which asserts a binary structure. Consequently, queer sexuality and its expressions threaten heteronormativity. Homophobia marginalises these voices and strengthens manipulative control of homophobic power structures over the individual body. Queer voices and representations challenge the binary concept of gender by asserting its fluid and explorative nature. Gender is a performative act, with behaviors and attributes associated with individuals of various genders. Moreover, it is not compulsory to be exclusive in nature. Instead, any individual can identify with either one or both genders. However, power structures often suppress these views to prevent acknowledgement of gender fluidity. Jacob Tobia's *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* (2019) and Billy Porter's *Unprotected: A Memoir* (2021) boldly recount their sexual discovery and declare that binary gender is a social construct. They challenge the narrative of body politics and reject the heteronormative control over their bodies.

Kristensen (2013) remarks, "Foucault analyzed the ways in which the interplay between constructing norms and practices based on these norms reflect on social institutions. This included investigating the ways in which discourses and knowledge are produced, and how they modify reality." (3) This concept of power manipulation has been analyzed in

different contexts. Gumilang and Retnaningdyah (4) explored the management of the social population through biopolitics and its impact on the suppression and conversion of humans to posthumans. Majumdar (5) discussed the influence of biopolitics on contemporary India's gender, caste, and slavery, analysing the intersection point through the lens of biopolitics. Like body politics, gender performativity has exposed the power structure's agenda of enforced gender binarity. Qonitah and Mustofa (6) used the central character of the novel *Simon Vs. The Homosapiens Agenda* to show the difficulty of living as a homosexual due to societal expectations regarding his gender performance, and how he transforms such norms. Mispah (7) has performed a close reading of Perumal Murugan's *Estuary* to analyze how the different characters of the novel perform their gender or deflect away from it. This type of body politics encroaches on the natural instincts of the body. It constantly attempts to reinstate essentialist attributes constructed by the binary structure.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak extensively discusses this essentialist politics and counters the agenda with the concept of strategic essentialism, through a postcolonial lens. In her article, Eide (8) discussed that members of some ethnic groups testify to the strategic usage of their ethnicity to gain media attention and access. Motamedi *et al.*, (9) stated that the Spivakian concepts of Essentialism and Imperialism are intertwined in Gabriel Garcia's *The Autumn of the Patriarch*. Hoyt and Morgenroth's (10) study of the impact of political orientation on sexual prejudice put together the theory of strategic essentialism through an empirical prism. They explored how conservatives strategically use social essentialism and trait essentialism to resist the inclusion of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual (LGBTQIA+) representations. These social theories have been explored and analyzed through a literary lens and empirical study in which the nuances of lived experiences are deconstructed and scrutinized. There is scope to amalgamate these concepts to examine LGBTQIA+ narratives, where body politics in the form of compulsory gender performance exists. A strategic response to this binarity opens the possibility of affirmative retaliation. The aim of this

study is to scrutinize the concept of body politics in the context of cisgender individuals and investigate how queer sexual expressions can strengthen gender performance. Additionally, this study seeks to determine whether acknowledging gender fluidity can counteract the prevalence of heteronormative body politics and to explore the potential of alternative, less authoritarian body politics that promote individual growth and well-being.

Methodology

The study primarily employs a qualitative method of textual analysis, where a close reading of two select gay autobiographies, *Unprotected* and *Sissy*, is employed. The title characters of the works, Porter and Tobia, were analyzed to understand the concepts of queer sexuality, cis-conditioning, and gender binarity. This paper addresses these issues through the theoretical lens of Michel Foucault's Biopolitics, Judith Butler's Gender Performativity, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Strategic Essentialism. Foucault's Biopolitics "is a technology of power that grew up on the basis of disciplinary power. Where discipline is about the control of individual bodies, biopolitics is about the control of entire populations" (11). It primarily targets to expose the manipulative control over individual body. Butler's Gender Performativity validates queer gender performance by stating that gender identity is not biological but performative (12). Spivak's theory of Strategic Essentialism offers a counter strategy of response against patriarchal heteronormativity. The objectives of this paper are examined and supported by evidences from two select American gay autobiographies and the aforementioned literary theories. These works were chosen as primary texts to examine queer politics in a Western power economy, where the initial agitations against queer marginalization originated. This helps to analyze the queer receptivity of the American nation, which claims its modern progressive mindset, and clarifies the present political position of gay men in developed nations like America.

Results and Discussion

Body Politics: A Strategic Tool for Cis-Conditioning

Body politics is an invisible manipulative control which hegemonic power structures exercise over individual bodies. Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, studied this and started discussions on biopolitics as a radical theoretical framework. He revealed how biopower is more threatening than sovereign power, which only ends life, while the former regulates life. It operates calculative to favor several political agendas and motives." To put it simply, the notion of biopolitics signifies politics concerned with life" (3). There is a concern about the authority to decide what is included in the discourse of knowledge. Kristensen quotes Foucault who says, "One has also to discipline knowledge in order to set them to serve a legitimizing and justifying role within the processes that limit, organize and modify human life" (3). Thus, this manipulation has a set motive for reinstating heteronormativity and cis-conditioning. Two autobiographical accounts, *Unprotected* and *Sissy*, demonstrate this power strategy. Critical review comments:

Billy Porter's *Unprotected* is the life story of a singular artist and survivor in his own words. It is the story of a boy whose talent and courage opened doors for him, but only a crack. It is the story of a teenager discovering himself, learning his voice and his craft amid deep trauma. And it is the story of a young man whose unbreakable determination led him through countless hard times to where he is now; a proud icon who refuses to back down or hide (13).

His exploration and experimentation with his sexuality map out his journey of self-doubt and trauma and finally challenge body politics. However, "Sissy is a candid, unapologetic look at Tobia's journey from child assigned male at birth in a semi-liberal North Carolina family to a gender queer activist on the national stage" (14). This narrative is a more stern and confident establishment of Tobia's non-binary gender identity. Both autobiographies corroborate how body politics attempts to confiscate their bodies, how cis-conditioning and heteronormativity are continuously reinstated into individual minds, how gender fluidity becomes their

sexual identity and how strategically they retaliate to manipulative power agendas. Porter and Tobia are very clear as children that they are different from other children of their age, as their feelings and likings are in contrast to the expectations of a normalized society. However, they are not certain about the reasons for feeling different, as no one has ever addressed these emotions. Porter recollected, "The Nice White Man was a doctor. He was working to help fix me" (15). Here, the institution of family and medicine collaborates to reinstate heterosexual norms.

Tobia, on the other hand, opened his memoir by stating: I never really got to have a childhood. Or perhaps a better way to put it is that, as a feminine boy my childhood was never really mine. 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 (16).

He exposed the social institution's sponsored biopower over his body when he was a child. Body politics ensure that the heteronormative structure of a normalized society is not disrupted by any interruption. For this, they marginalised the queer voices and suppressed their resistance. Porter says, "A hard truth was driven into me that day, as indelibly as that iron spike on the elementary school fence: Just because a stage was rightfully mine didn't mean I would be allowed to mount it" (15). The reward for not deviating from the norm and pre-defined structure is the luxury of the immense opportunity offered by the system. However, as soon as an individual tends to deviate from the norm, the system rounds and attacks him or blocks all possibilities to progress.

Social institutions manipulate individual bodies through powerful discourses. Religion is one such institution that highly influences an individual's reality and thought processes. The authority of religion is often exploited to propagate homophobia within its subjects. When the narrative comes from a deep-rooted source, no individual questions its authority. Therefore, queer people are always sharply criticized and abandoned through religious propaganda. Porter says,

I feel used, God is used as a weapon to control. I don't like what humans have done to the idea of God. Maybe there is no God. Maybe it's just us humans

down here fucking everything up, and when the universe is tired of the evolution experiment the world will simply implode". The rejection he encounters from his religion breaks his inner peace and calm (15).

Tobia reflects on the abandonment of his religion from an entirely different perspective. He never longs for acceptance from them but demands embracing the way he is. Thus, when they fail to do so, he strongly opposes their manipulative politics in harsh terms. He says, how could they do this to me? It was my spiritual journey, it was my testimony. Who were they to tell me that my path with God wasn't good enough? Who were they to tell me that the love I knew wasn't real? Who were they to tell me that God didn't love me just as I was? How dare they? (16).

Kristensen quotes Foucault when he remarks, Here it is crucial to think power in terms of production: 'In fact, power produces, it produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production' (3).

Body politics ensures that individuals do not explore their sexuality and remain ignorant of their bodies. This ignorance is often taken advantage of by certain people who sexually exploit and abuse the weaker sections. Sexual abuse of minors is the most relevant instance. Porter recollected the memories of his stepfather sexually abusing him under the guise of making him manlier, as per the demands of a normalized society. Since he was ignorant of his own body, he never recognized it as an abuse. Another hidden impact of body politics is the internalization of guilt within the minds of individuals. This is an extensive recreation of the concept of panopticon, as illustrated by Michel Foucault. In this concept, he explains, "When people internalize the presence of this surveillance there is no need for actual human gaze anymore: people act as if there is somebody watching"(3). It is a means for self-surveillance, where every individual ensures that they do not deviate from the norm, which will otherwise outcaste them from the whole. Every time there is a strong urge to explore one's sexuality or embrace gender fluidity, they are instantly pulled back by the sense of guilt that tames and informs them to settle within heteronormativity. Porter was reluctant

queer in his early days. It takes him time to overcome this constructed guilt and realize that he can be unapologetic about his sexuality and expression.

Tobia's early days are colored with guilt and frustration for what he is allowed to feel and what he feels. He says, for queer and trans people, life in 'The Closet' can be a nasty business. It's not just the experience of withholding your identity from people you love, living a half-truth while you navigate the world as someone else that is traumatic (16).

Individuals engage in an unbreakable self-blame loop. He adds: The closet led me to blame myself for my own lack of courage, my own inability to be honest, my own inability to 'just open the door', rather than blaming the people around me who'd built a world where everyone was presumed to be straight and cis in the first place, where queerness was an inconceivable other (16).

Despite these torments and humiliations, both Porter and Tobia learn to strongly resist the biopower exercised on their bodies. When Porter marries the love of his life, he narrates that normalized media and society target their love only because they are gay couples. At that point, he realizes that loving anyone of any sex, class, or religion can never be a sin but only a beautiful bonding between two individuals. He rebukes this power play when he writes, "And once again our gay love is only seen through the lens of sex; a private interaction between adults that ain't nobody's business but the grown folk engaging in the act" (15). Tobia, on the other hand, openly informed his readers of the toxicity of body politics. He said, "I'm sharing this with you because I want the world to understand that depriving a child of the ability to express their gender authentically is life-threatening" (16). He is aware of the threat that the position holds and sacrifices it demands. However, this does not stop him from owning his own body. He says, I understood that by challenging gender norms and conventional masculinity, I was challenging, well, everything. 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 (16).

He proudly proclaims, "I'm a gender transcendentalist (16)!" Both these queer figures successfully smashed body politics and embraced

their sexuality with dignity. Kristensen points out Foucault's intent in his words which says "we should be trying to discover how multiple bodies, forces, energies, matters, desires, thoughts, and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted as subjects or as the subject" (3).

Queer Sexual Expression: A

Reaffirmation of Gender Performativity

Gender performativity is a controversial feminist concept put forth by the theorist Judith Butler in their essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988). Butler deconstructs the idea of binary gender identity and roles, which, according to a normalized society, are biologically prewired into two distinct sexes. They remark, "... what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (17). It cannot be an ingrained feature because it is molded and structured according to the cultural attributes and practices of the society in which individuals survive. She adds, "In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (17). Porter and Tobia confirm these arguments by the way they perceive their gender and proudly express it, disrupting the binary gender division insisted upon by a normalized society. They embrace gender fluidity and unapologetically flaunt it daily. However, it took them some time to realize that gender roles were being thrust upon them when, in reality, they did not identify with those distinct roles. Porter recollects his fascination for his Aunt's shoe closet but is often reminded that it is wrong for a boy to get attracted to it. The binary structure of gender division pre-fixes right and wrong for both genders. Porter questions this and enquires about the necessity of such an explicit distinction and the rationale for resistance against an individual's choice of gender. Tobia, however, remembers his childhood and comments: I longed to experiment with my gender. I longed to wear pink, to try on frilly garments, to envelop my body in sequins and cover my lips with bright lipstick...Instead I was relegated to trying on oversize blazers, doctor's jackets, or construction vests. Through social pressure and gender correction by teachers, I was steered away

from anything with the slightest edge of femininity (16).

Social institutions such as families and schools are instrumental in reinforcing gender binarity within children to prevent them from challenging the power agenda in the future. Butler argues that this binarity is only a construct and supports it with the statement of renowned theorist Simone de Beauvoir where they say, "...the body is a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation"(17). They claim that gender is not a natural fact but a product of historical situations. This clarifies that gender can be redefined and designed according to an individual's affiliations. The concepts of masculine and feminine are enormously ingrained into the minds of the subjects which compel them to bring anyone in line who deviates from them. The doctor whom Porter's mother consults declares, " Billy is a fine boy....You just need to get a man around the house, to teach him to be more masculine" (15). Ironically the doctor itself acknowledges that masculinity can be taught to the boy, reconfirming that a gender is only a performative act. Now, the concern is about the ownership of authority to decide an individual's gender performance. According to Butler, this should be an individual choice, rather than being regulated by strict gender rules. As a child, Tobia always had clarity in what he wanted and how he needed his gender identity. His protest against a normalized society's attempt to force gender binarity is fiercer than that of Porter. He says, I don't believe my childhood had to be the way that it was....I doesn't believe 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 (16). He refused to internalize gender norms and instead attempted to explore his gender and define it himself. Porter takes time to realize that it is a personal choice to perform gender in the way they relate to it. Later, as an adult, he appeared on red carpets, disrupting all masculine expectations by wearing skirts and frills. He recollected, " My bold fashion choices for the weekend of Golden Globes realness began to crack open a different kind of public conversation

concerning what garments are and are not acceptable for men to wear at these cultural red carpet events" (15). He chooses to perform his gender in a more feminine way, to which he relates, rather than being entrapped within exclusive gender divisions. This substantiates Butler's statement, " As Foucault and others have pointed out, the association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural 'attraction' to the opposing sex or gender is an unnatural conjunction of cultural constructs in the service of reproductive interests" (17). Despite many queer figures' resistance to compulsory gender binarity, they undergo painful encounters of rejection and marginalization because they defy the norm. Butler writes, "...those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" (17). Tobia wittingly remarks on the illogicality in the sex of a person being thrust onto them as their gender identity. He writes, "Genitals had the ability to tell us everything about who we were, about how we should function in the world. They determined the future" (16). There are clear agendas behind the heteronormative opposition, which include the preservation of masculine power dominance, rein station of women's social position as the second class and marginalization of the third gender's liberal sexuality. Therefore, theorists like Judith Butler resist the vicious agenda, as they state: Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds (17).

Tobia beautifully pens it down in simple yet logical words when he writes, 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. And so my coming out is never complete (16). This underpins Butler's radical statement, "Gender is thus a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (17). The population must acknowledge this power play, which controls and

limits individual liberty to the extent that they fear expressing their sexuality and gender identity in the way they perceive it. Unknowingly, people have surrendered their authority to choose, to credulous power structures. Butler ends it by remarking, "Gender then can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent. And yet, one is compelled to live in a world in which genders constitute univocal signifiers, in which gender is stabilized, and polarized, rendered discrete and intractable" (17).

Strategic Acknowledgement of Gender Fluidity: A Response to Heteronormative Body Politics

Strategic essentialism is a pragmatic approach to hierarchical domination and power play formulated by the postcolonialist and feminist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Motamedi *et al.*, quote her words regarding strategic essentialism as "...a plan that nationalities, cultural groups, and marginal groups can use to present themselves" (9). Here she advocates "positivist essentialism" (8), where essentialist features like race, colour, or sex can be temporarily downplayed to eliminate otherness. Essentialism propagates binary divisions, in which hierarchies are celebrated. The queer community is the prime target for marginalization because of its nonconforming sexuality and appreciation of gender fluidity. A more effective approach to body politics could be to strategically unite for a temporary period and embrace gender fluidity as an essentialist quality. When they stop resisting this and acknowledge its possibility for any gender, their voices become louder and more persuasive. Porter and Tobia strategically incorporated this approach as a political response to homophobia.

Porter proudly writes, "You're flawed and that's okay. Flaws make us human. Flaws give us grace" (15). Norms try to interpellate that individuals must be perfect, and they can only achieve this by strictly following these norms. Porter dismantles these arguments and acknowledges that if their deviation from norms makes them flawed, let them remain flawed because that is their identity and what makes them human. Tobia calls this self-love when he writes: But here's the remarkable thing about self-love: When you start to love yourself for the first time, when you start to truly embrace who you are-

flaws and all-your scars start to look a lot more like beauty marks. The words that used to haunt you transform into badges of pride (16).

He discusses the importance of embracing one's true identity rather than accepting that imposed by the normalized society. It liberates a person from prolonged agony and frustration, and acts as a political response to heteronormativity. So he adds: ...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 (16).

Their attempts to resist the unfair manipulation of their bodies and sexuality label them outcasts and marginalize them. Every time they attempt to fit in, homophobic power structures mark them as the other, who threatens the system. As Porter and Tobia assert, it is logical to not attempt to fit into the binary structure by flaunting their gender fluidity, which is a more powerful response that power sources cannot suppress. Once they acknowledge their sexuality, they find inner peace, which helps them exhibit their reality for the world to witness. Porter writes,

I'll never stop what I'm doing. I'll never stop being who I am,' I seethed.' They don't like it, they're going to have to kill me.'...That day was a turning point in my life. It marked the moment I stopped caring about making anyone else comfortable with who I was (15).

Porter realized that strategically embracing his sexuality in private cannot have a significant effect on the political context. Thus, he resisted it publicly by appearing at the Oscars in a gown and proclaiming his gender fluidity. Although he does not realize the political statement of his actions, it soon dawns the retort he has set forth. In comparison to Porter, Tobia is outwardly and generous in strategically appropriating his gender fluidity in his lifestyle. According to him, this is his political statement to manipulative aversion to gender neutrality. He writes: I expressed my gender in real time as I discovered it. I didn't say, 'Mom, Dad, I'm

questioning my gender,' I just showed up at the dinner table in lipstick one day. I didn't say, 'I'm gender queer,' I just started shopping for different kinds of clothes. I never said, 'I, Jacob Tobia, am now a member of the trans community,' I just started hanging out with more and more trans folks until it became an afterthought (16).

He questions the necessity of asserting the acceptance of one's sexuality when it is better to strategically flaunt it as a norm. This is an ideal reaction for homophobic action. The strategic appropriation of gender fluidity can have repercussions, but according to Tobia, it is essential to own one's body and function accordingly. He writes, "That discrimination was going to be part of my reality, and I'd be better off if I could plan for it and make my own decision about how to maneuver" (16). This is a strategic acceptance of the queer position, which is not imposed by heteronormative power structures but is rightfully owned by marginalised queer individuals. In his memoir, Tobia discussed the radical position of drag. He writes, "When used properly, drag is a radical tool that challenges the gender binary by mocking it, heightening it, exaggerating it, or rejecting it altogether, but that doesn't mean all performers experience it equally" (16). Drag strategically embraces queer identity and challenges gender binarity. It pragmatically represents how gender is a performative act, rather than a biological essence. Tobia acknowledged his queerness, and strategically structured it as a political statement. He writes: I am not a man. I am not a woman. I am a glimmering, gender queer, gender nonconforming, beautiful, human person, and I don't identify that way for fun. I don't identify that way because I think that 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 (16).

One of the prime factors for the indomitable opposition to queer sexuality is its power to derange the argument that the single purpose of sex is reproduction. If this argument is invalidated, the foundation of major social institutions such as family, marriage, and the economy will crumble. The prospect of an individual's experimentation and exploration of their sexuality threatens the existence of hegemonic power structures, as it can uproot

existing unequal hierarchical social structures. This can result in the absolute collapse of the structure, which is crucial for holding the population together. This highlights the relevance of a futuristic concept called affirmative biopolitics. It addresses "the possibility of biopolitics which could be less authoritarian and be integrated with other practices increasing freedom in the Foucauldian sense" (3).

It is a prospective future for contemporary societies where "biopolitics seems to be just another field in which unequal power relations come forth. Thus the affirmative biopolitics is always a matter of politics not of the means to modify the biological" (2). However, life management is a political process. It is a complex amalgamation of social institutions, individual interests, class differences, etc. To create a less authoritarian system that focuses more on individual progress appears to be an unrealistic tool for combat. Until layers of divisions such as class, caste, color, and sex exist within a population, it is highly unfeasible to practice affirmative biopolitics. Because if we want to make a critical analysis of contemporary biopolitics, we should investigate, first, who has the power to define what is seen as truth. Who is entitled to define the process of verediction? Secondly, we should study what kinds of power relations are embodied in truth production: by which mechanisms some interpretations become seen as truths while other alternatives are excluded. Furthermore, we should ask whose health and bodies matter. Which biological forms of sexes, of races and of individuals are seen worth living and which are deemed unworthy? Finally through what kind of guiding techniques individuals are incited to recognize themselves as subjects of particular biological qualities. How doctors, teachers, parents and health experts guide people to subject themselves as being strong or weak, capable or handicapped, normal or abnormal, part of supreme or inferior race etc (2).

Every aspect of human life is political, and it is impossible to implement an ideal system of body politics without exploitation or confrontation. The only practical retaliation to balance manipulative body politics is a strategic acknowledgment of multiple gender identities to develop it into a prevalent option of gender division.

Biopower is a modern lethal tool of manipulation that is incorporated into the normalized system by hegemonic power structures. It is not exercised through force, but through norms and social expectations. This paper discussed how body politics are often employed as a strategic tool for cis-conditioning. This was not a recent shift in the agenda, but a strategy utilized for a long period, which remained unsuspected and evidently unexposed to the public. The recent spotlight gained by queer protests and initiatives has brought the concept of body politics to discussion forums. Queer individuals interrogated the secretive agenda of homophobic power structures to marginalize their sexuality and the right to life. They questioned the authority of power structures in determining the authenticity of the constructed norm. They argued that sexuality cannot be limited to formulated norms but must be explored and experimented with according to the personal choice of individuals. The control of normalized authority over it is an enslavement of individual freedom. Porter and Tobia narrated how they challenged cis-conditioning and demanded control over their bodies in their memoirs. They ensured that they flaunted their sexuality in public spaces and defined the man oeuvre of body politics. They embraced gender fluidity and allowed the normalized system to realize that it could not manage their lives.

This study explored how queer sexual expression acts as a reaffirmation of gender performativity. Often, a binary-structured society attempts to teach boys and girls how to act as masculine and feminine according to their gender. This finding confirms the primary argument that gender is a set of performative acts. This becomes problematic when the authority to decide the performance of one's gender rests on the hegemonic power structure. The line between these two exclusive gender divisions can be blurred. Porter and Tobia provoked the system by performing gender fluidity. They rejected identifying with masculinity, which was the pattern they expected to follow. Instead, they paraded in skirts, wore heels, and makeup. They demanded to know how gender fluidity makes an individual less human and why it is mandatory to be strictly masculine. This defiance cost them severe marginalization, but it did not stop them from

constantly reinforcing their queer gender identity for the world to witness. The final section of the paper enquired into the possibility of the strategic acknowledgement of gender fluidity as a capable response to heteronormative body politics. This underlined the urgency for different queer identities to temporarily unite and propagate the significance of gender fluidity, thus challenging heteronormativity. To achieve this aim, they must deny conforming to any of the binary gender divisions and embrace their deviation from the norm. Once they accept and acknowledge their queerness, they should pragmatically demonstrate that lines can be blurred within the system. Porter and Tobia strategically performed their gender, not just in the private space but also in public spaces, to declare their political response to gender binarity. The possibility of affirmative biopolitics is discussed, and it is concluded that until social institutions and individual interests are involved in structure-making, it is unrealistic to have a less authoritarian form of biopolitics. Kristensen highlights Foucault's words in this context when he says, "...human bodies are always part of a political field where 'power relations have an immediate hold upon it (the body); they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (3). Despite progress in queer inclusivity in most modern nations, the system fails to offer justice to queer individuals at the micro level of their lives. They continue to face discrimination in schools, workplaces, healthcare, and access to housing. The post Covid-19 scenario has increased these disparities, and the world is witnessing an increase in hate-speech and crimes against queer individuals. Social inclusion requires authorities to remove all laws that criminalize or discriminate against Queers. This includes the learning atmosphere of the children, which must not be influenced by homophobic discourses.

Conclusion

Education plays a crucial role in developing the social, cultural, and political mindset of children, who eventually grow up as individuals and propagate learned ideologies. Thus, a shift in the learning space can alter future discourse on sex and gender identity (18). The United Nations has introduced many

significant queer inclusion initiatives. The LGBTI Inclusion Index with the Proposed Set of LGBTI Inclusion Indicators was published by the UNDP and the World Bank. UNDP's regional "Being LGBTI" and "SOGIESC and rights" programmers aim to build understanding of the issues faced by LGBTI people and promote their inclusion in national development efforts. ILO's PRIDE project has identified good practices in discrimination faced by LGBT people in the workplace. UNESCO's work on homophobic and transphobic violence, including bullying in educational institutions, has resulted in several publications, one of which is "Good Policy and Practice in HIV and Health Education – Booklet 8: Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying." UNESCO's 2019 report, "Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying", also highlighted evidence of school violence and bullying. The World Bank has been conducting research to expand the evidence-based links between LGBTI exclusion and development through its project design. OHCHR developed the Standards of Conduct for Business in tackling discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, which are now supported by hundreds of businesses. The development of legal initiatives suggests a shift towards a more inclusive mindset that embraces queer identities. It is crucial for individuals to participate actively in this evolving discourse to create a postmodern world that is welcoming and inclusive (18). This study proposes a potential solution to manipulative body politics, which is to recognize and accept gender fluidity as a social reality for gender expression. However, this study only examined two American gay autobiographies to explore the concept of body politics and Queer individuals' responses to it. The response to this power play is highly contextual and cannot be generalized. Body politics addresses the concerns and manipulations at the macro level, but fails to incorporate other micro level issues of queer bodies. Further, the implementation of a strategic response to homophobia is a very critical act, because a slight deviation from the purpose could result in reinstatement of biological determinism. The theoretical frameworks used in content analysis primarily focus on the body and the politics surrounding it. However, they fail to address other

gender discussions such as racial aspects and masculinity issues, socioeconomic status, and geographical intricacies. Expanding this study to include this aspect could provide a more complex understanding of queer identity. Additionally, there is the potential for a comparative study of queer narratives from various cultural contexts to identify the cultural nuances of body politics.

Abbreviations

Nil.

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Author Contributions

Rachana S Pillai developed the idea of the research and wrote the manuscript. Dr. Yadamala Sreenivasulu supplied some secondary materials for the research, guided the scholar in the writing process, and proofread the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the study of this article.

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