

# THE POLITICS OF FEAR: ANALYZING THE SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS OF HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA IN VIVEK SHRAYA'S I AM AFRAID OF MEN

## Abstract

This research paper examines the societal implications of homophobia and transphobia through an analysis of Vivek Shraya's memoir, "I Am Afraid of Men," using Stryker's identity theory as a framework. Stryker's theory, rooted in social constructionism, posits that identities are socially constructed through interactions and power dynamics. Shraya's memoir offers a poignant exploration of the politics of fear, shedding light on the ways in which these phobias perpetuate discrimination and marginalization within society. The paper begins by providing a theoretical overview of Stryker's identity theory, emphasizing the construction of dominant cisgender and heterosexual identities that maintain oppressive norms. It then delves into a detailed analysis of Shraya's narrative, unpacking the experiences and consequences of homophobia and transphobia on both individual and collective levels. Through her personal experiences as a trans woman of color, Shraya exposes the mechanisms of power embedded within homophobia and transphobia. The paper explores how fear is weaponized to suppress the agency and self-expression of LGBTQ+ individuals. Drawing from Stryker's theory, the paper highlights the negotiation of identity within oppressive systems and the psychological toll of internalized homophobia and transphobia. It discusses the ways in which these phobias manifest in self-doubt, shame, and a constant sense of danger for LGBTQ+ individuals. Furthermore, the paper underscores the urgency of societal transformation. By intertwining personal narratives with theoretical analysis, Shraya's memoir

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emphasizes the need to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems to create inclusive and equitable societies. The research paper concludes by examining the implications of Shraya's work for broader social change and emphasizes the importance of engaging in critical self-reflection to confront and dismantle the politics of fear. The findings of this research contribute to ongoing conversations surrounding LGBTQ+ rights, social justice, and the creation of more inclusive societies.

**Keywords:** Homophobia, Transphobia, Identity, Discrimination, Transwoma, inclusive and equitable societies. The research paper concludes by examining the implications of Shraya's work for broader social change and emphasizes the importance

## I. INTRODUCTION

“The first question we usually ask new parents is:“Is it a boy or a girl?””. There is a great answer to that one going around: “We don’t know; it hasn’t told us yet.”Personally,I think no question containing “either/or” deserves a serious answer,and that includes the question of gender.”

Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*,2013.Sex typically refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish males and females, including reproductive organs, hormones, and chromosomes. It is often categorized as male and female based on physical attributes such as genitalia observed at birth. On the other hand, gender is a social and cultural construct that encompasses the roles, behaviors, identities, and expectations society attributes to individuals based on their perceived sex. Gender involves the socio-cultural attributes of masculinity and femininity and it is more fluid and diverse. It includes a range of identities, such as transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, and genderfluid, among others. The distinction between sex and gender is important because it recognizes that not all individuals' gender identities align with their assigned sex at birth.

Many people experience a disconnect between their gender identity and the expectations society has based on their biological sex. As Judith Butler (2015) said in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, “Gender is instituted through the stylization of the body, and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (140). Recognizing this difference helps foster a more inclusive and understanding society that respects and validates diverse gender identities and expressions. Sexual orientation encompasses the individuals, if any, to whom one feels sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction. It is a fluid aspect that has the potential to change or develop over time. On the other hand, sexuality pertains to how individuals structure and navigate their erotic and sexual experiences within their lives.

The natural characteristics associated with gender and the biological processes of sex and reproduction provide only a vague and open-ended foundation for the cultural construction of gender and sexuality. The concepts of what gender entails, how men and women are defined, and the nature of their relationships are not mere reflections or extensions of biological realities. Instead, they are predominantly shaped by social and cultural influences. The degree of importance given to biological factors varies across different cultures. Some cultures strongly assert that male-female distinctions are primarily determined by biology, while others place minimal emphasis on biological differences, or even question their existence altogether.

Gender roles encompass societal constructs regarding the expected behaviors and responsibilities assigned to individuals based on their gender. For example, dolls are traditionally associated with girls, while cars are associated with boys. On the other hand, gender identity represents a person's inherent and profound sense of their own gender, which may or may not align with their assigned sex at birth. The term "gender identity" was initially coined in 1964 by Robert Stoller and Ralph Greenson, establishing a distinction between the social aspect of gender and one's psychological understanding of their gender.

This concept is further expanded upon by Julia Serano, an American author, speaker, spoken word performer, musician, activist, and biologist, who identifies as a trans woman. Serano's transfeminist works, including "Whipping Girl," "Outspoken," and "Excluded," delve into the intricacies of gender. In "Whipping Girl," Serano introduces the notion of "experiential gender," which represents the lived, felt, and firsthand experience of one's own gender, as well as the genders of others that we perceive or form assumptions about, but can never truly comprehend tangibly. This is distinct from "perceived sex" or "perceived gender," which refers to the gender assigned to us by others.

Transgender individuals are people whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. Gender identity refers to a deeply held sense of being male, female, or another gender, which may not align with the sex determined by physical characteristics. Transitioning refers to the process of aligning one's physical appearance and social expression with their gender identity. It is important to approach this topic with respect and understanding, as the experiences and journeys of transgender individuals are diverse and unique. Vivek Shraya, a Canadian trans writer and activist said in one of his interviews "When I realized I was queer, it took me a long time to embrace it. How do you embrace something that people have told you is negative from childhood?" Transgender people always feel like a soul being wrapped in a body. In *I am Afraid of Men*, "Unfortunately, any ambiguity or nonconformity especially in relation to gender, conjures terror" (Shraya,2018)

The process of transitioning can vary widely from person to person and may include social, medical, and/or legal steps. Social transitioning involves living and presenting oneself in a manner consistent with their gender identity. This may include changing one's name, pronouns, and appearance to align with their true gender. Social support from friends, family, and community can play a crucial role in affirming and validating a transgender individual's identity during this time.

Medical transitioning may involve hormone replacement therapy (HRT), which involves the use of hormones, such as estrogen or testosterone, to develop secondary sexual characteristics that align with a person's gender identity. Hormone therapy can have a significant impact on various aspects of an individual's physical appearance and well-being. However, it is important to note that not all transgender individuals choose to undergo hormone therapy, and it is a personal decision that depends on individual needs and preferences. Gender-affirming surgeries, also known as gender confirmation surgeries or sex reassignment surgeries, maybe another aspect of transitioning. These surgical procedures can help individuals modify their physical characteristics to align with their gender identity. The types of surgeries vary depending on the individual's desired outcomes and may include procedures such as breast augmentation or removal, genital reconstruction, facial feminization or masculinization surgery, and other body contouring procedures.

Legal transitioning involves updating identification documents, such as driver's licenses, passports, and birth certificates, to reflect an individual's correct name and gender marker. The legal process for changing identification documents can vary depending on local laws and regulations. It is essential to recognize that not all transgender individuals undergo medical or surgical interventions as part of their transition. Each person's journey is unique, and they have the autonomy to choose the steps that feel most authentic and comfortable for them.

The bill defines **(i) a “transgender person” as someone who is:**

- neither wholly female nor wholly male; or
- a combination of female or male; or
- neither female nor male; and whose sense of gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at the time of birth, and includes trans-men and transwomen, persons with intersex variations and gender-queers. (Transgender Persons Bill, 2016)

Transitioning is a deeply personal and transformative process that can have a significant impact on a person's well-being and quality of life. It allows transgender individuals to live authentically and in alignment with their true selves. However, it is important to note that the process of transitioning can also bring challenges and obstacles, including social stigma, discrimination, and limited access to healthcare and support services. Creating an inclusive and supportive environment for transgender individuals is crucial. Respecting individuals' gender identities, using their preferred names and pronouns, and advocating for policies that protect their rights are vital steps in fostering a more inclusive society. Education and awareness about transgender experiences and issues can help dispel misconceptions and promote acceptance, empathy, and equality for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression.

Transgender literature, like other forms of literature, has evolved over time to reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of transgender individuals. It encompasses a wide range of genres, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, memoirs, and academic works, which explore various aspects of transgender identity, challenges, triumphs, and the broader social and cultural context surrounding it. In the past, transgender representation in literature was limited and often portrayed through stereotypes or as tragic figures. However, with increased visibility and acceptance of transgender individuals in society, there has been a significant growth in transgender-authored and transgender-themed literature that offers nuanced and authentic portrayals of transgender lives.

Contemporary transgender literature explores a multitude of themes, such as personal journeys of self-discovery, the complexities of gender identity, experiences of transitioning, navigating relationships and family dynamics, the intersectionality of gender with race, sexuality, and class, and the social and political challenges faced by transgender individuals. “A few friends asked me why I have mostly detailed the violence I have had to face while rarely recounting pleasurable moments. I believe narrating acts of violence other hijras or I have faced is important to build awareness.” – A Revathi, trans woman and activist. Transgender authors are leading the way in telling their own stories, sharing their experiences, and challenging societal norms and prejudices. These works often provide powerful and personal narratives that give voice to the transgender community, promote understanding, and foster empathy among readers.

One notable development in transgender literature is the emergence of memoirs and autobiographies written by transgender individuals. These deeply personal accounts offer intimate glimpses into their experiences of self-realization, coming out, transitioning, and the impact on their lives and relationships. These narratives not only help transgender individuals find validation and resonance with their own experiences but also educate and enlighten

readers who may be less familiar with transgender identities. Fictional literature has also seen a rise in transgender representation. Transgender characters are being portrayed with greater complexity, authenticity, and depth, allowing readers to connect with their struggles, hopes, and dreams. These stories often explore the emotional and psychological aspects of gender identity, while also delving into wider social issues and the intersections of identity and power dynamics.

Transgender poets have been using their art forms to express their unique experiences, challenges, and celebrations. Poetry provides a medium for exploring the complexities of gender identity, the search for self-acceptance, and the resilience of the transgender community. These poems challenge societal norms, provoke thought, and offer solace and empowerment to readers who may resonate with the themes explored. In addition to creative works, transgender literature includes academic texts and critical analyses that contribute to the academic study of transgender studies, gender theory, and LGBTQ+ studies. These scholarly works explore the historical, cultural, sociological, and psychological dimensions of transgender experiences, shedding light on the societal constructions of gender, identity, and the impact of discrimination and marginalization.

The evolving transgender literature reflects a broader societal shift towards greater acceptance and understanding of transgender individuals. It serves as a powerful tool for education, empathy-building, and advocacy. By centering transgender voices and experiences, this literature challenges prejudices, breaks down stereotypes, and contributes to a more inclusive and equitable society. As transgender literature continues to evolve, it is essential to support and amplify the voices of transgender authors, to seek out their stories, and to engage in open and respectful conversations about the themes and issues raised within their works. This literary evolution fosters a richer and more comprehensive understanding of transgender identities, ultimately leading to increased acceptance and equality for transgender individuals in society.

"I Am Afraid of Men" by Vivek Shraya is a poignant and introspective exploration of masculinity, gender, and the profound impact of fear in our lives. In this powerful and courageous memoir, Shraya delves into her personal journey as a transgender woman of color, offering a raw and honest examination of the societal forces that perpetuate fear, particularly the fear of men. With vulnerability and grace, Shraya reflects on her own experiences growing up in a world that often glorifies and reinforces toxic masculinity. She confronts the fear that has been instilled within her, shaped by the oppressive norms and expectations imposed upon her gender identity. Through vivid storytelling, she sheds light on the deep-rooted anxieties and trauma she has faced, both as a victim and witness to the pervasive effects of misogyny and violence.

"I Am Afraid of Men" is not just a personal narrative but also a broader exploration of the interconnectedness of gender, power, and privilege. Shraya fearlessly addresses the systemic issues that perpetuate gender-based violence, toxic masculinity, and discrimination. By sharing her own struggles and vulnerabilities, she invites readers to critically examine the ways in which fear shapes our lives and communities, challenging us to dismantle harmful norms and cultivate empathy and understanding. Through her insightful prose, Shraya offers a call to action—a call to interrogate the impact of gender norms, to challenge toxic masculinity, and to create spaces of safety and empowerment for all individuals. She

demonstrates the power of personal storytelling as a catalyst for change, inspiring readers to confront their own fears, biases, and assumptions.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This research paper utilizes a qualitative research approach to analyze the societal implications of homophobia and transphobia in Vivek Shraya's memoir, "I Am Afraid of Men." The methodology includes the following steps:

**Theoretical Framework:** Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Susan Stryker's identity theory, rooted in social constructionism, are selected as the theoretical frameworks for analysis. These theories help to examine the construction of identities, power dynamics, and the impact of societal norms on LGBTQ+ individuals.

**Textual Analysis:** A close reading and analysis of Shraya's memoir are conducted to identify and extract relevant themes related to homophobia, transphobia, and the politics of fear. The researcher engages in a detailed examination of the narrative, focusing on personal experiences, societal implications, and the consequences of homophobia and transphobia.

**Data Coding:** The identified themes and patterns from the textual analysis are coded and categorized to identify key findings and connections. This process involves labeling, categorizing, and organizing the data to facilitate interpretation and analysis. The coded data is analyzed in relation to the selected theoretical frameworks. This involves drawing connections between the identified themes and the theoretical concepts of identity, power, and social constructionism. The analysis seeks to uncover the ways in which homophobia and transphobia perpetuate discrimination and marginalization within society. The methodology employed in this research paper combines textual analysis with theoretical frameworks to provide a nuanced examination of the societal implications of homophobia and transphobia. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences presented in Shraya's memoir and their broader implications for understanding and addressing discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals.

## III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"EMMA Talks: Vivek Shraya: I'm Afraid of Men (2018)" is a thought-provoking video presentation by Vivek Shraya, hosted by SFU's Vancity Office of Community Engagement. In this talk, Shraya expands upon the themes explored in their book of the same name. Through their engaging and articulate delivery, Shraya offers a personal and powerful examination of the societal fears, expectations, and violence that surround masculinity. By sharing their own experiences and reflections, Shraya sheds light on the complex dynamics of gender and the ways in which fear affects both individuals and communities. This video serves as a valuable resource for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the issues addressed in "I'm Afraid of Men," and it reinforces Shraya's commitment to fostering dialogue and social change.

Isabella Vincent's article "Mediation of Manhood in Vivek Shraya's I am Afraid of Men (2022)" offers a compelling analysis of Shraya's book. Vincent explores the ways in which Shraya challenges societal expectations of masculinity and examines the complex

dynamics of power, fear, and vulnerability. The article highlights how Shraya's work disrupts traditional notions of manhood and encourages readers to critically reflect on their own understanding of gender. Vincent commends Shraya's introspective and thought-provoking writing style, emphasizing the importance of their narrative in fostering conversations about masculinity in contemporary society. Overall, the article recognizes the significant impact of Shraya's book in redefining and reshaping our understanding of manhood

Nicole Erin Morse's article "The Transfeminine Futurity in Knowing Where to Look: Vivek Shraya on Selfies (2019)" is an insightful interview with trans artist Vivek Shraya. The article delves into the gendered politics of self-representation and the societal stigma surrounding Shraya's selfies. Shraya discusses the power dynamics involved in controlling the gaze and emphasizes the importance of knowing "where to look." The interview explores the transformative potential of selfies in shaping a transfeminine futurity and challenging existing norms and stereotypes. Morse's article highlights Shraya's unique perspective on self-expression and the ways in which selfies can be a form of resistance and empowerment for marginalized individuals.

Parul Nayar et., al (2021) article "Corporeal Reclamation in Vivek Shraya's Art: Asserting the trans woman" explores Vivek Shraya's work as a means of redefining notions of gender identity and femininity. The article aims to arrive at a more inclusive definition of womanhood by studying Shraya's narrative as a trans woman. Shraya's artistic repertoire, including works such as "I'm Afraid of Men" and "The Boy and the Bindi," is examined to understand the possibilities of constructing a gender-fluid feminine identity and redefining womanhood through corporeal reclamation. While the authors acknowledge their outsider perspective, their intention is to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of womanhood through sincere effort and understanding. The article intersects themes of trans identity, sexuality, gender studies, feminism, and transfeminism in analyzing Shraya's artistic expressions.

#### **IV. INTERNALIZED FEAR: SHRAYA'S PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON NAVIGATING HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA**

Homophobia and transphobia are forms of discrimination and prejudice against individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+). While these terms are often discussed together, they refer to distinct but related types of discrimination.

Homophobia refers to negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards individuals who are attracted to the same sex. It can manifest as prejudice, discrimination, or hostility towards gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people. Homophobia can range from subtle forms, such as microaggressions and exclusion, to more overt forms, including hate crimes and violence. Transphobia, on the other hand, is the negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors directed towards transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. Transphobia can involve prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion based on a person's gender identity or expression. It can also result in harassment, bullying, and violence against transgender individuals.



Both homophobia and transphobia have harmful effects on individuals and communities. LGBTQ+ individuals may face higher rates of mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, as well as higher rates of suicide attempts and substance abuse. They may also experience social isolation, stigma, and reduced access to healthcare and other resources. It is important to note that homophobia and transphobia are not universal; they vary across cultures and societies. Some countries and communities have made significant progress in promoting acceptance, equality, and human rights for LGBTQ+ individuals, while others still struggle with widespread prejudice and discrimination. Efforts to combat homophobia and transphobia include education, advocacy, legal protections, and creating safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals. Increasing awareness, fostering empathy, and challenging harmful stereotypes are essential in promoting acceptance and creating inclusive societies. Allies and supporters play a crucial role in standing up against discrimination and advocating for equal rights and treatment for LGBTQ+ individuals.

“I’m afraid of men because it was men who taught me to hate and eventually destroy my femininity.” (Shraya,2018) says Vivek Shraya in his book *I am Afraid of Men*. In analyzing Vivek Shraya’s statement, we can apply Stryker’s theory to understand the intersections of gender identity, societal norms, and personal experiences. Susan Stryker’s Identity Theory focuses on the relationship between individual identities and larger social structures.

According to Stryker, individuals construct their identities based on their subjective experiences and how they are categorized within societal frameworks. In Shraya’s statement, she highlights her fear of men, suggesting that her subjective experiences with men have shaped her perception. This fear might be a response to negative encounters or harmful experiences she has had with men, leading her to associate them with hatred and the destruction of her femininity. Stryker emphasizes that gender is performative, meaning that individuals actively engage in behaviors and expressions that align with societal expectations of masculinity or femininity. Shraya’s mention of “destroying femininity” suggests that she has encountered societal pressure or oppressive gender norms that devalue femininity. Men, as a dominant group within patriarchal structures, might have contributed to enforcing these norms, leading Shraya to associate men with the suppression or rejection of her femininity.

Stryker argues that identities are shaped by power dynamics and social structures. Shraya’s statement implies that the harmful experiences she had with men have influenced her fear. Men, as a privileged group, often hold power within society, and their actions or behaviors can reinforce oppressive systems. Shraya’s fear may stem from a recognition of this power imbalance and the potential harm it can inflict on her identity and well-being.

“*I’m Afraid of Men*” by Vivek Shraya explores fear as an essential tool in understanding the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly trans women, in a heteronormative and patriarchal society. Fear, in this context, serves as a powerful and poignant narrative tool to shed light on the challenges faced by marginalized communities. Shraya has used fear as a both powerful and deploying tool in the life of a transgender individual. Shraya used the concept of fear as a catalyst to come out of the narrow world where transgenders have been mistreated by society. Shraya says “Even now, after coming out as a trans girl, I am more afraid than ever.” (Shraya,2018). It reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of fear that many transgender individuals experience, even after

embracing their true identity. It stands as a testimonial for continuing vulnerability. Coming out as a trans girl is a significant and courageous step towards embracing one's authentic self. However, this line suggests that despite this milestone, vulnerability and fear persist. The fear expressed in this line also encompasses internal struggles. Vivek Shraya might be grappling with self-acceptance, body dysphoria, or fear of not being fully understood and accepted by others, including her loved ones.

Fear becomes a catalyst for personal transformation and empowerment. Through Vivek Shraya's own experiences, the book delves into the fear she felt growing up in a world that scrutinized her identity. By openly acknowledging her fears, she is able to reclaim her power and embrace her identity unapologetically. "A FRIEND AND I are celebrating Edmonton Pride by cheering from her balcony every time we see someone on the street draped in rainbow paraphernalia." (Shraya,2018). The act of cheering for individuals adorned in rainbow paraphernalia showcases solidarity and support for the LGBTQ+ community during Pride. It demonstrates the authors' allyship and commitment to celebrating diversity and inclusivity. Cheering from the balcony sends a positive message to those participating in Pride celebrations on the street. It creates a safe and encouraging atmosphere, making individuals feel seen, valued, and celebrated in their expression of identity. As Kalki says in one of her interviews "We wanted to belong; we are not the others, we are one of you. We want to be included and that is why I have titled the book *We Are Not The Others.*"

As a girl, Shraya has come to embrace and value her chest hair, seeing it as a symbol of uniqueness and individuality, even though it deviates from societal expectations. In the past, when she presented as a boy, she adhered to the conventional norms of grooming and grooming practices, but now she finds more comfort and appreciation in my non-conformity. However, society is often unforgiving towards ambiguity or nonconformity, particularly concerning gender roles and expressions. Because of this, both men and women may feel fearful or uncomfortable around her, as she challenges traditional norms and expectations. The author reflects on their journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance, particularly in relation to their gender identity and body hair.

"As a girl, I've grown to appreciate my chest hair—a black flame rising from my bra—" (Shraya,2018). It also addresses the broader societal context in which gender nonconformity is met with fear or discomfort. The author notes that any deviation from traditional gender norms can be unsettling for others, leading to apprehension from both men and women. This fear arises from the deeply ingrained gender norms that expect individuals to conform to specific roles and appearances based on their assigned sex at birth. The author's personal journey of embracing their chest hair as a girl challenges societal expectations and norms. It highlights the importance of self-acceptance and the need for a more inclusive and understanding society that celebrates diversity in gender expressions and identities. Additionally, it sheds light on the fear and discomfort that can arise when confronting individuals who challenge rigid gender norms, prompting readers to consider their own attitudes and perceptions towards gender nonconformity.

Vivek Shraya shares her experiences conducting anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia workshops at a Toronto college for a decade. Many of the participants in these workshops were liberal, well-intentioned staff members who initially seemed resistant or complacent, thinking they already knew everything about LGBTQ+ issues. Despite their

initial skepticism, Vivek would delve into the topic of all-gender washrooms during these workshops. At this point, participants would reveal their biases by expressing concerns about their own safety. As a facilitator, Vivek's role was to listen patiently to these concerns and respond with alternative perspectives in a delicate and calm manner, ensuring a comfortable environment for open discussion

However, she faced the challenging task of privileging homophobic and transphobic remarks made by respected staff members and professors over her own comfort and experiences as a colleague. This situation was undoubtedly difficult for Vivek, but she remained dedicated to creating a space for learning and growth. To counter these biases, Vivek would share real stories about students and staff at the college who had experienced harassment or distress in washrooms due to their gender expression. Hearing these accounts would evoke outrage and sympathy among the participants, causing a shift in the mood. As a result, they became more receptive to the rest of the workshop's content, reflecting on their privilege and considering ways to become better allies. As DaShanne Stokes says "If you voted for a man who said", Grab 'em by the pussy," you have zero room to claim to protect anyone in bathrooms." In spite of society's hatred towards the transgender community, Shraya wants to create a safe space for the queer community.

In "I'm Afraid of Men," Vivek Shraya reflects on her experience as a trans woman and the realization that her lifetime of independence and self-reliance had been influenced by male privilege. This notion can be understood in association with Susan Stryker's identity theory, particularly when examining how gender identity impacts one's perception of self and interactions with society which explores how gender identity is not just an internal, individual experience but also a social construct deeply influenced by cultural norms and expectations. According to this theory, gender identity is not innate but rather shaped by societal factors and perceptions.

In Vivek Shraya's case, her previous experience living as a male meant that she had benefited from certain advantages and privileges tied to her male identity. These privileges often include greater autonomy, self-reliance, and societal encouragement to be independent and assertive. As a male, she may not have felt the need to depend on others or ask for assistance frequently, as this might not have been perceived as negatively as it might be for someone perceived as female.

However, upon transitioning and living as a woman, Vivek's gender identity changed, and she had to confront societal expectations and norms that often pressure women to be more reliant on others and less assertive. This shift in perception and treatment based on her gender is a clear example of how gender identity, as per Susan Stryker's identity theory, is socially constructed and impacts one's experiences and behaviors in society. "Being a girl has required me to retrain myself to think of depending on others or asking for assistance not as weakness or even as pathetic, but rather as a necessity." (Shraya,2018)

The concept of retraining herself to view dependence on others or asking for assistance as a necessity rather than a weakness aligns with Susan Stryker's identity theory. As Vivek Shraya navigates her identity as a trans woman, she faces the challenge of reconciling her newfound gender identity with the societal expectations and norms tied to being perceived as female. In essence, Vivek Shraya's experience exemplifies how gender

identity is shaped by societal constructs, impacting the way one perceives themselves and is perceived by others. Her realization of male privilege and the adjustments she makes in her life as a trans woman illustrate the complexities of gender identity and the importance of challenging traditional norms and expectations to foster a more inclusive and understanding society.

“On the hierarchy of harassment, staring is the least violent consequence for my gender nonconformity that I could hope for.” (Shraya,2018). The line specifically mentions "staring" as one form of harassment experienced by gender-nonconforming individuals. Staring refers to the act of prolonged or intense gaze directed at someone, often making them feel uncomfortable, judged, or objectified. Even though staring might not involve physical violence, it can still be emotionally distressing and harmful. Prolonged and judgmental stares can contribute to feelings of insecurity, fear, and discomfort, impacting the mental and emotional well-being of the individual targeted. By stating that staring is the "least violent consequence," Vivek Shraya is implying that there are more severe and potentially harmful forms of harassment or mistreatment that she and others like her might face. It suggests that staring is a milder form of mistreatment compared to other potential negative outcomes. The phrase "that I could hope for" indicates that Vivek Shraya understands the unfortunate reality of potential mistreatment due to her gender nonconformity. Despite this, she expresses a wish for the mildest form of harassment, hoping to avoid more severe, violent, or dangerous consequences. It sheds light on the experiences of gender-nonconforming individuals who must navigate a world that may not fully understand or accept their gender expression. It highlights the need for greater awareness, acceptance, and respect for diverse gender identities and expressions.

"How do I love a body that was never fully my own?"(Shraya,2018). The author articulates a profound and complex sentiment regarding her relationship with her own body as a trans woman. This line encapsulates the struggles, self-discovery, and self-acceptance that many transgender individuals experience during their journey of embracing their true identity. Vivek Shraya's statement delves into the intricate connection between gender identity and the physical body. For transgender individuals, there can be a profound disconnect between the gender they identify as and the physical characteristics of the body they were assigned at birth. This discordance can create a challenging internal conflict, making it difficult to fully love or accept their own body. By questioning how to love a body that doesn't feel entirely hers, Vivek Shraya articulates a journey of self-discovery and self-love. This journey involves exploring her authentic identity, embracing her true self, and learning to accept her body as a part of that identity.

Vivek Shraya also expresses fear of women who, like men, reject her preferred pronouns and refuse to acknowledge her femininity. This rejection denies her identity as a woman and further marginalizes her as a trans individual. The fear also stems from women who scrutinize her appearance, even down to details like chipped nail polish. This hyper-critical attitude perpetuates the idea that she doesn't fit the conventional idea of womanhood. “I’m afraid of the women who, like men, reject my pronouns and refuse to see my femininity, or who comment on or criticize my appearance, down to my chipped nail polish, to reiterate that I am not one of them.” (Shraya,2018) Shraya's fear extends to women who, when she shares her experiences as a trans woman, dismiss her by saying, "welcome to being a

woman." This response fails to recognize the distinct experiences and challenges faced by trans women compared to cisgender women.

It highlights Shraya's apprehension towards other women because of her past experiences, which have taught her that she can't fully rely on them for sisterhood, allyship, or protection from men. This suggests that some women may not be supportive of their journey or may perpetuate harmful norms and behaviors. The fear of women, as described by Shraya, is not unfounded but rather a result of her own history and experiences. It reflects the painful realization that not all women will stand in solidarity with her as a trans woman, adding to her feelings of vulnerability. It highlights the complexities of intersectionality within the women's community. While women, as a group, share certain experiences and challenges, the experiences of trans women differ significantly from cisgender women due to the intersection of gender identity and assigned sex at birth.

Shraya asks transgender readers to think about how frequently they have disregarded or devalued aspects of their own appearance, behaviors, emotions, and aspirations simply because they were deemed too feminine or masculine. She asks the readers to imagine how their life might be different if they didn't subject themselves to these gender-based labels, and more importantly, if they didn't impose them on them either. The main cause behind all of these fears is transphobia and homophobia. Vivek Shraya narrates her own encounters with homophobia and transphobia, illustrating the impact of these prejudices on her life and well-being. She exposes the fear and vulnerability she feels due to societal norms that perpetuate discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. Shraya addresses the intersectionality of oppression, recognizing that her experiences as a queer, transgender woman of color compound the challenges she faces. She acknowledges that marginalized individuals often endure multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. The book delves into both overt and subtle forms of homophobia and transphobia. Microaggressions, such as dismissive comments or invalidating someone's gender identity, can be just as harmful as more explicit macroaggressions. She penned down her fear as words being a transwoman in every aspect of her life but still, she is evolving in society.

Vivek Shraya uses exclamation marks to alter her tone and convey submissiveness when communicating with men, aiming to avoid agitating or offending them. This is a tactic she employs due to societal expectations that discourage assertiveness in women. When walking alone and hearing someone behind her, she instinctively moves aside, fearing potential harm. This fear has been heightened by societal norms where men are often perceived as asserting their presence both spatially and sonically. Despite her efforts, she often finds her fear is unfounded, yet it persists due to the lasting impact of past experiences and societal conditioning.

Hi Jim!

Hope you are well! Just following up on my message from two weeks ago, about the broken cupboard in my unit!  
Please let me know when you have time to take a look!

Thank you!

VS (Shraya,2018)

Vivek Shraya reveals that she uses exclamation marks to modify her tone, making her words sound more submissive when communicating with men. This is a conscious effort to navigate a society that often expects women to be deferential and non-confrontational. The use of exclamation marks reflects the societal pressure for women to avoid being too assertive or direct when interacting with men. Being assertive is often perceived negatively for women, while a more submissive tone is expected to maintain harmony and avoid conflict. It also delves into Vivek's fear and anxiety when walking alone and hearing someone, especially a man, walking behind her. Her instinctual response is to move to the edge of the sidewalk to give way, as she has learned to be hyper-aware of her surroundings to feel safe. Shraya notes that men tend to assert their presence both spatially and sonically when walking, which can add to her anxiety. This perceived assertion reinforces the societal norms of dominance and control associated with masculinity. Despite her attempts to stay vigilant, Vivek Shraya often finds that her fear is unwarranted when she checks over her shoulder and finds no one there. This experience highlights the lingering effects of past experiences or societal conditioning that contribute to her fear of any noise or rustle behind her.

## V. CONCLUSION

The prime motive for writing the book "I'm Afraid of Men" by Vivek Shraya is to shed light on the pervasive issues of toxic masculinity, gender norms, homophobia, and transphobia that exist in society. Through her personal experiences and reflections, Shraya aims to raise awareness about the harmful impact of these social constructs on the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly transgender women. By sharing her own journey of growing up in a society that often enforces rigid gender roles and expectations, Shraya aims to challenge these norms and promote inclusivity and acceptance. Her candid storytelling allows readers to empathize with her struggles, fears, and vulnerabilities, fostering a deeper understanding of the discrimination and violence faced by transgender individuals.

"We all watched Philadelphia in the 90's, I was like, "Oh! That's what going to happen to me. I am going to get this disease and I 'm going to die." How do you know anybetter? This was before the internet" Shraya said in one of her interviews about how did she get to know about the life of queer gender people. Shraya reflects on her experiences in the 1990s when she first learned about the lives of queer and gender-nonconforming individuals. She mentions watching the movie "Philadelphia," which was released in 1993 and stars Tom Hanks as a gay lawyer living with HIV/AIDS. The movie brought attention to the AIDS epidemic and the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals during that time. When Shraya watched "Philadelphia," she had a significant realization that resonated with her. Seeing the portrayal of a gay man living with HIV/AIDS on screen, she thought that the same fate awaited her as a queer individual. At that time, societal awareness and understanding of queer issues were limited, and HIV/AIDS was widely stigmatized and misunderstood.

Shraya's comment, "I was like, 'Oh! That's what going to happen to me. I am going to get this disease and I'm going to die,'" reflects the fear and anxiety she experienced due to the lack of information and representation about queer lives in mainstream media. She then mentions the absence of the internet during that time, indicating that access to information and diverse narratives about LGBTQ+ lives was severely limited compared to the present

day. The internet has since played a crucial role in disseminating knowledge and fostering greater understanding and empathy towards queer and gender-nonconforming communities.

This conversation emphasizes the importance of accurate representation and inclusive storytelling in media. It also underscores how access to information can shape perceptions and experiences, with limited exposure leading to misunderstanding and fear. Shraya's realization highlights the profound effect that media representation, or the lack thereof, can have on marginalized communities and the need for increased visibility and understanding of LGBTQ+ lives. She also said, "I think one of the things about being Queer is that it is so wonderful that you learn to build a family outside of the biological family." It is a feeling of being trapped in the wrong body. In spite of that uneasiness, Shraya feels fellow feeling and belongingness with the queer community.

In *Stone Butch Blues* the author emphasizes the same point in a different connotation, "Strange to be exiled from your own sex to borders that will never be home" (Feinberg,1993). It highlights the feeling of disconnection and estrangement that transgender individuals may experience. Transgender people often do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, leading to a sense of being disconnected from their assigned gender. The term "borders" symbolizes the societal and cultural boundaries that define gender norms and expectations. For transgender individuals, these boundaries can feel restrictive and suffocating, as they are unable to find a sense of belonging or home within the confines of these rigid gender norms. It evokes a sense of longing for acceptance and understanding from society. Transgender individuals may yearn for a world where they are embraced for their authentic selves without facing judgment or discrimination. The emotional toll of experiencing transphobia and homophobia can be immense. It can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, depression, and a sense of not belonging, affecting the mental health and well-being of transgender individuals. It emphasizes the importance of creating safe and accepting spaces for transgender individuals, where they can find a sense of belonging and be respected for their gender identity. It calls for a more inclusive society that celebrates diversity and rejects discrimination.

Further research can explore the intersectionality of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly queer and transgender people of color, to understand how multiple marginalizations impact their experiences of homophobia and transphobia. It can be an investigation of how media representation influences stereotypes and prejudices toward LGBTQ+ individuals while exploring the potential for accurate portrayals to challenge homophobia and transphobia. The researcher can conduct legal and policy analysis to understand how laws and policies affect the rights and protections of LGBTQ+ individuals and address issues of homophobia and transphobia. It can be researched about the psychological impact of experiencing discrimination on the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals, exploring interventions and support systems to enhance their well-being. Investigate the role of allies and advocacy in challenging homophobia and transphobia, identifying effective strategies to promote allyship within society. The researcher can analyze the historical roots of homophobia and transphobia to understand their societal origins and contemporary influence on attitudes and behaviors.

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