

Denial of Self: A Contrasting view on Transgender through Meredith Russo's *If I was Your Girl*

E. Gymsy

Ph.D. Research Scholar (Reg. No: 22113164012011)
Department of English &
Centre for Research
Scott Christian College (Autonomous)
Nagercoil – 629 003.

Dr. A. Linda Primlyn

Associate Professor
Department of English &
Centre for Research
Scott Christian College (Autonomous)
Nagercoil – 629 003.

*Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627012,
Tamilnadu, India*

Abstract

Meredith Russo, an American transgender novelist portrays a contrasting view on transgender in her novel *If I was Your Girl*. Transgender people have a different gender identity which was assigned during their birth. Russo talks about the denial not the regular social denial caused to them but about the self-denial they do to themselves. In the novel, the protagonist Amanda faces the gender identity crisis and strives hard to accept herself. Transgenders discriminate their self in the grounds of biological sex and face many criticisms and difficulties in their living. If they show their identity as a transgender in the society, families, and friends will illtreat them. They avoid telling their gender truth to stop the people in the society to see them as an untouchable one. Transgender should accept their identity as a part of human condition and understand it is the biology that determines their sex. They should accept themselves as strong and extraordinary.

Keywords: Denial, Disability, Gender, Transgender.

American literature is written or produced in English in the United States of America and its preceding colonies. Studying American literature allows you to put your finger on the pulse of the nation's culture. Disability studies began to emerge in the West in the late twentieth century. The attitude towards disabled individuals are as diverse as people are diverse. Meredith Russo is an American transgender writer. She wrote about the challenges of being a transgender in her debut teen novel, *If I was Your Girl* (2016). This novel shows how the protagonist's transition, friends, family, and education helped her to find her true self

admits of her self-denial. Amanda is the protagonist of the novel. The author brings about a change in the protagonist life through physical transition. At almost 19, Amanda born Andrew, finally has a chance to be the girl she knows she was meant to be. She has survived relentless bullying, senseless violence, and a suicide attempt. And finally transitioned bravely to be her true self. She was now a high school senior. Amanda Hardy has just moved to small-town Lambertville, to make a fresh start and to leave her painful life behind.

This paper portrays 'Trans' as a disability of gender in people. Now trans studies and disability studies have developed as distinct disciplines. In many cultures, gender is equated to biological sex and people are taught about the only two possibilities: male and female. Some people do not believe they fit neatly into either category. This experience is referred as transgender, or 'trans.' Gender and sex are generally used as interchangeable terms. However, these terms differ from each other. Gender and sexuality are socially constructed, whereas the sex of the person is biological. The society decides the role for each gender and expects them to act accordingly and those who act differently to their gender are considered as queer. Transgenders are those whose gender identity does not match with their biological sex.

Meredith portrays the problems faced by the transgender (protagonist) from the beginning of the novel. She has been bullied so many times. Amanda has arrived Lambertville having barely slept, wearing concealer to cover up the remnants of her former life, a fading black eye she received for using the 'wrong' bathroom at the local mall. She was thinking and worried of her past life as Andrew. Her thoughts are painfully dark: "If I'd had the strength to be normal, I thought, or at least the strength to die, then everyone would have been happy." She was worried even after her transition. "Even now that I had my surgery, even now that nothing but some legal papers could reveal my past, I was never safe. "Small town Tennessee with bumper stickers that casually announce "I CAN'T HELP THAT I'M HOMOPHOBIC. . . I WAS BORN THAT WAY!" (92). Amanda is hoping to keep her gender as secret.

True Self (also known as real self) and false self (also known as fake self) are psychological concepts, originally introduced into psychoanalysis in 1960 by Donald Winnicott. True self is described as a sense of self based on spontaneous authentic experience and a feeling of being alive, having a real self. The true self is represented by our real feelings and desires, while the false self is a side of us that has changed its behaviour,

repressed feelings, and pushed needs aside in order to survive. By accepting yourself the way you are and being fully what you are, your presence can make others happy. Gender identity forms an important part in life. It dictates the degree how a person views oneself and relates to other persons ideas and nature. Gender identity is something related with self-reflection. Identity crisis arise when there is a flaw in the identity. In this novel, Amanda searches her identity even after her gender transition from a male body to a female one. The protagonist Amanda faces the Gender identity crisis and strive hard to accept oneself.

Few express their denied feelings in their own way through words in the form of song or a poem. Joseph Crawford, a transgender poet pours out her feelings to get rid of the pain of her sexual abnormality,

. . . I see you in every sense I make, knowing
I have to spend it all on you.
Storing it away to get rid of you, but will you ever truly leave?
after every shot after Inception will you still be glued to my thoughts?
May be you're just a part of me.
May be you're just not the parasite, I made you out to be
May be you're just a part of me. (19-24)

Transgender people usually have the problem of negative thinking. While travelling through the bus Amanda meets a guy and he asked about the reason for her black eye questioning with whether it was made by her boyfriend. She felt that he was thinking herself as a girl. At that time, she was thrilled to hear. Even after transitioning her mind did not accept, she was a girl. When her hair gets long, she was mistaken to be a girl. Whenever she is treated as a girl, she gets happy. Her thinking itself makes herself not confident about her gender. But she was happy whenever she was mistaken for a girl. Only when she is mis thought as a girl, she feels herself to be a normal teenage girl. It must be overcome by her. She was attracted towards negative thinking even in reading. "As people all around the world fell asleep and never awakened again." She catches this negative thought when she was reading a book called *Sandman*.

Transition period is a sort of period in which they grow confidence to face the society in this transforming period they will accept their gender identity. But if they fail to accept their gender identity it may cause mental stress and illness in them. It is necessary for them to accept transition because it is related with their mind and circumstances. She was facing lot

of stress during transitioning. The stress of transitioning was too much for her. Amanda was over conscious about her transitioned self and she keeps on thinking and reminding herself about her name. She keeps on telling herself on her mind “My name is Amanda”. She wanted to hide her past and she didn’t want to reveal her past to anyone. Her appearance was more common like a boy and a girl so she tells that “Nobody could tell if I was a boy or a girl”. She reveals her past to her friend Bee, after trusting bee when Bee says that she is a Bisexual. She tells Bee that she was Andrew Hardy earlier and now she wanted to live like Amanda Hardy. She tells about her transition of boy to girl. She hides her identity from her family and friends. First, she reveals her gender to her mother. Amanda tells her mother about her issues and she gives positive words for Amanda when she was worried about her gender. She gives her hope through quotes from the bible stating “There ain’t a thing in God’s creation that could undo the love I have for my son” (17). Then she squeezed her leg hard enough to make Amanda to listen to her words. She said “Anything, anyone, is better than a dead son” (17). She says that she felt like a girl inside her was a true thing and was not bad or wrong. After revealing the truth to her parents, she was wondering what kind of clothes will her Mom and Dad would get her.

In Transgender community, some trans accept their changes and move on as trans throughout their lives even though they face many criticisms difficulties in their living. But most of the transgenders do not show themselves as trans because of their families and friends if the show their identity as a transgender in the society families and friends main ill treat them. If people know them as a trans they may treat them as a different creature even they will treat in bad manner to stop the people in the society see them as an untouchable one and they will not offer them jobs which brings them down and the social status. These are the reason why they start begging and indulge in illegal work. In order to avoid these horrible situations, they hide their identity from the society.

Transgenders feel misalignment in their gender. Amanda feels weird about her gender. Some transgenders are not able to show their identity directly to the society which causes mental illness to them. While going through a bus she encounters with the public. “The musician looked up from his magazine and nodded while I gathered my things. An older man with leathery skin and a sweat-stained work shirt scanned me from my feet to my neck without making eye contact” (10). She could not stand with the public staring at her. She feels irritated and stepped down with whispering a short prayer to God that she really

listened anything. This incident makes her annoyed and creates the bad opinion about the public.

Femininity is hidden in the object of the mail which makes transgenders uncomfortable Amanda wants to see herself as a changed person from Andrew she did not want to be like Andrew but she wants to reveal herself as Amanda. Now she has figured out her identity and she changed her identity by transition and she begins to continue her daily life.

Transgender people in many parts of the world can legally change their name to something consistent with their gender identity. The protagonist of this novel changed her name as Amanda Hardy from her former name Andrew Hardy.

Transgenders think that they are born in male body with female mind and soul. Changing gender is a brave one for the transgenders because they can express their feeling as they wish. When transgender people express themselves, they must face many challenges in the society. Transgender struggle around the term sex and gender, they even fight for their recognition and for their equality. Transphobia makes them polyvalent in discrimination and they face many troubles in the society. Gender is something socially constructed and gender means 'what you are' and sexuality means 'what you love'. Gender and sex related to each other, for instance there is no gender without sex and sex without gender.

Transgenders finds happiness and fulfilment after their transition and they build courage to handle the society with confidence. Amanda as well as David hides her identity to the society. She was not interested in revealing her past to anyone. She was attending a bible study in the church with her friend Anna and the pastor went on with the word of God. He keeps repeating that "A dishonest life is a life half-lived" (98). She was thinking about pastor's words regarding dishonesty and asks herself, Would her friendships and relationships always be dishonest if she was forever hiding her past? She says that everyone was living with lie, And maybe secrets and lies were a part of life and agrees that everyone had something they were lying to themselves about or something they were hiding. She felt that she was supposed to hear this sermon at this moment for a reason. Before attending the sermon, she was blaming God for her gender (trans) issue and now she says that the people who said God did not love her were wrong. She says that God wanted her to live and this is the only way she knows to survive. She accepts to live by accepting God's words

“I decided that the people who had said God didn’t love me, who said that I didn’t have a place on Earth – they were wrong. God wanted me to live, and this was the only way I knew how to survive, so this was what God wanted. This is what I wanted. I had chosen to love, and it seemed like, finally, I was doing just that” (99).

She identifies herself by accepting her own self. She felt sorry for herself for not being there for herself. Earlier she was apologizing for existing in this world and now she was apologizing for trying to be who she was. She started loving herself through hope by saying she deserves it. Now she boldly says that she is not sorry anymore for her existence. She accepted herself and accepted her trans identity which is her true self. Everyone has their own identity and their own true self. Try accepting your own self whoever you are to lead a happy and peaceful life.

Revealing a truth needs boldness and braveness when the truth is far away from the reality. Revealing is a part of accepting the truth. She wanted to reveal the truth regarding her gender to her love Grant. she was not able to convey her problems directly to her lover Grant. So, she revealed the truth with the help of word document. She started typing everything what she wanted to convey. She wrote, “Dear Grant, I wrote after a moment. This is the story of my life. When I was born my parents named me Andrew Hardy and the doctors wrote “male” on my birth certificate. They had no idea who I would grow up to be” (200).

Trans are believed to have created specially by God. According to the Bible, in the book of John, Jesus was passing away on a street, at that time he saw a man who was blind from his birth. Among his disciples one of them asked Jesus, whose sin made that man to be blind right from his birth. Jesus replied “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:3). Transgenders are also believed to be created under the same circumstance as the blind man. In transgenders life, accepting their self and exploring their identity becomes a difficult part of their life. As a part of self-discovery, they undergo many issues. They can overcome their turmoil by moulding their nature.

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