

A Rhizomatic Study of Memories and Materialities in 21st Century Queer Lives

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By

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I am dedicating this book to my husband and my son for their endless support and love.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 What does it mean to be 'He/She/They' in the 21st century?

"*Human bodies* and *human subjects* do not pre-exist as such; nor are they mere end products. *Humans* are neither pure cause nor pure effect but part of the world in its open-ended becoming."

- Karen Barad (2003)

Similarly, Donna Haraway (2006) says, '*Human* requires an extraordinary congeries of partners. *Humans*, wherever you track them, are products of situated relationships with organisms, tools, much else' (2006, 146). These writers resonate the idea that *Human* is an act of becoming in an ontological sense. Despite the research of the scholars and the works of the activists, *Humans* continue to occupy a normative space defined against those who are deemed excluded from this space. It is the act of de-humanization of marginalized people. Judith Butler (2004) says, 'It is not just that some humans are treated as humans, and others are de-humanized; instead, de-humanization becomes the condition of production of the Human.' (2004, 90). It brings attention to the normative practices that exclude marginalized people who do not fall within the defined normative space. The recent trends in critical theory, literary studies, anthropology, cognitive archaeology, and philosophy turn their attention towards posthumanism to deconstruct the primacy of humans on earth. Feminist scholars and Queer theorists are proposing newer ways of perceiving human drawing from the above disciplines. This study is primarily concerned with how gender is a *becoming* in the context of Queer lives as well as an attempt to situate gender in a material-discursive continuum drawing heavily from memory studies, new materialism, posthumanism, cognitive archaeology, and gender studies.

Sex is often determined biologically, either *male* or *female*. The term 'gender' is usually defined as how culture and society reinforce masculinity and femininity (Haefele 2019). Feminist theorists acknowledged the existence of dimorphism in sex alignment by separating the biological sex from the socially assigned gender. Still, they did not account for the grey

areas in gender. Towards the end of the twentieth century, social science research began to shift toward recognizing identities other than purely *male* and *female*. When a child is born, or during an obstetrical ultrasound, the genitalia identify it as one of the two sexes. When the baby's genitalia cannot identify the child as one of the two sexes, there is a chance that the baby will have sex development differences (DSD). Historically, these babies were known as hermaphrodites, but in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, they were known as *intersexual*. Some people do not identify with their birth sex, but there is no explicit identification in genitalia for them. They are known as transgender people. Transgender people struggle to identify with the sex assigned to them at birth. There are different levels of transgenderism, with some people only being cross-dressers, others being gender nonconforming, and others wanting to experiment with their gender. Certain transgender people are referred to as transsexuals because they have surgically altered their bodies to reflect their felt gender.

The body plays an important part in modern feminist ideology. Foucault challenges dichotomous thinking or dualism and views the body as the site of power and resistance. He tried to politicize the body. Foucault (1980) argues that subjectivity is the influence of authority on the body. He concentrates on the manifestation of subjectivity. Based on Foucault's analyses, Butler (2011) proposes that the body existed before culture; so recognizing, in Foucauldian terms, the body's materiality before cultural inscription. Foucault made no distinction between consciousness and the body or between the body and subjectivity. He contends that subjectivity and consciousness are embodied. Also, discourses, institutions, and other power systems affect the body, resulting in subjectivity. Third-generation feminists employ the body as a place of political struggle or opposition to society's accepted bodily practices pertaining to their femininity.

In terms of gender and sexuality, the body has always been a source of contention. It is more valid for LGBTQ¹ people than for anyone else. It is always a site of identity projection as well as a site of conflict. Transgender people's lives are marked by a greater awareness of the body's materiality and its associated subjectivity. Non-linear biology produces a growing body of evidence of homosexual, transgender, and non-reproductive heterosexual behaviour in animals that defies the traditional homosexual/heterosexual divide. Intersex cells comprise the vast majority of cells in the human body (Hird & Noreen 2016). The recognition of the third gender in India is not new, with evidence of the existence of gender nonconforming people dating

¹ LGBTQ – Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer

back over 2000 years. Indian epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata depicted gender non-conforming people respectfully, and they were found to have occupied important positions during the Mughal era (Vakoch 2022). Gender nonconforming people were known as Eunuchs in British India. People who are cross-dressers, gender nonconforming, or transgender men and women are called Eunuchs. Despite literary evidence indicating the existence of gender nonconforming people in the West, colonizers despised transgender people as beggars and unnatural prostitutes. Gender nonconforming people were treated with dignity, and society admired them for their uniqueness at birth. They were regarded as proponents of religious practices, and people believed in their blessings and curses. They perform dances at Hindu festivals and are summoned to bless newborn babies in Hindu households or cases of death. This tradition is followed in various rural parts of India.

In India, gender-nonconforming individuals, such as transgender and intersex people, are known as third genders. They are also referred to as Hijras (Kalra 2012). Their customs, rituals, and way of life have a distinctive culture. A Hijra society is governed by a Guru or Kala guru, who must be an elderly transgender woman, and the other Hijras are known as Chela (students). Disciples support some middle-aged Hijras. These gurus and disciples are members of a house. Each city houses more than one hijra house. Each house has its own regulations and never permits begging or sex work on other houses' territory. A transgender woman can join this group and become a hijra by completing pooja and rituals for the chosen guru. Once a person joins a house, they are not permitted to leave without permission from their gurus. The disciples beg or engage in sexual activity for survival in their respective hijra houses. In the past decades, transgender individuals often travelled to Mumbai and Delhi, but now there are Hijra communities in almost all the major cities.

The 2017 Gender Revolution (Revolution 2017) edition of *National Geographic* magazine includes a special segment on the science behind gender. According to a study conducted at the Netherlands Institute of Neuroscience in Amsterdam, sexual differentiation of the brain begins in the second half of pregnancy, whereas genital development starts in the early weeks of pregnancy. The brain and the genitals are exposed to diverse surroundings, drugs, and other chemical compounds, which might constitute the difference felt by transgender people. In another study, Swab and his colleagues revealed that trans women have fewer somatostatin-associated cells than women in a specific brain region. A study conducted in Spain determined that the white matter on brain scans of trans guys is

neither male nor female but rather somewhere in between. These findings indicate how physiological aspects (material brain) influence how people feel in addition to cultural and sociological variables.

History of Transgender and Intersex People

Transgender history is a complex and multifaceted topic, as transgender individuals have existed throughout history and in many cultures. The modern understanding of transgender identity, however, has only emerged in the past century or so. A critical figure in the history of transgender identity is Magnus Hirschfeld, a German physician and sexologist who founded the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin in 1919. Hirschfeld was one of the first medical professionals to recognize and study transgender individuals, and he advocated for their rights and recognition.

In the United States, the Stonewall riots of 1969 are often cited as a turning point in the history of transgender activism. The riots, which took place at a gay bar in New York City, were sparked by police brutality against members of the LGBT community. Transgender individuals, particularly trans women of color, played a prominent role in the riots and in subsequent activism. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, transgender activism grew and gained visibility, with groups like the National Transsexual Counselling Unit and the Transexual Menace advocating for transgender rights and recognition. In 1990, the first National Transgender Day of Remembrance was observed in memory of transgender individuals who had been murdered due to transphobia. In recent years, transgender issues have become increasingly prominent in the public discourse, particularly in relation to debates over gender identity and bathroom access. Despite the progress that has been made, transgender individuals continue to face significant discrimination and stigma, and there is still much work to be done to ensure their full inclusion and acceptance in society.

Transgender people, or hijras, have a long and complex history in India, dating back centuries. In ancient India, hijras were often respected and revered as spiritual leaders and were believed to have the power to bless or curse others. However, over time, hijras came to be marginalized and stigmatized, with their gender identity and expression criminalized under British colonial rule. Today, transgender people in India continue to face significant discrimination and marginalization, including limited access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. In 2014, the Indian government recognized transgender people as a third gender, which was

seen as a significant step forward in terms of legal recognition and protection.

However, the implementation of this policy has been slow and uneven, and many transgender people still face significant obstacles in accessing fundamental rights and services. Discrimination and violence against transgender people, particularly hijras, remains common, and many are forced to turn to begging or sex work to survive. Several organizations and advocacy groups are working to improve the situation for transgender people in India, including the National Legal Services Authority, the Human Rights Law Network, and the Transgender Welfare Equity and Empowerment Trust. However, much more needs to be done to ensure that transgender people in India can live their lives with dignity and respect. Intersex people, who are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical male or female classifications, have a long and complex history. In many cultures, intersex people were revered as sacred or supernatural beings and were believed to have special powers or abilities. However, in other cultures, intersex people were stigmatized and marginalized and were often subjected to violence, discrimination, and even infanticide.

1.1.1 Intersex

In ancient Greece, intersex people were referred to as hermaphrodites, named after the god Hermes and the goddess Aphrodite, who were said to have joined together to create a being with male and female characteristics. In some Native American cultures, intersex people were known as Two-Spirits and were considered to have a unique spiritual connection to both male and female energies. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, intersex people were often subjected to medical interventions designed to "correct" their physical sex characteristics and force them into binary gender categories. It included surgeries to remove or alter genitalia and hormone therapies designed to suppress or enhance certain physical traits. These interventions were often traumatic and led to long-term physical and emotional harm.

Today, intersex people are increasingly advocating for their rights and recognition within the medical community and broader society. In 2015, the United Nations condemned the practice of non-consensual medical interventions on intersex children, calling for an end to these harmful practices. In many countries, intersex people are fighting for legal recognition of their gender identity and access to healthcare and other essential services. Despite the progress that has been made, however,

intersex people continue to face significant challenges, including discrimination, stigma, and lack of access to specialized medical care. There is still much work to be done to ensure that intersex people can live their lives with dignity and respect.

1.2 LGBTQIA+ rights

LGBTQIA+² rights have come a long way in many parts of the world. LGBTQIA+ individuals face significant discrimination, violence, and legal barriers in some countries. In many countries, same-sex marriage is now legal, and anti-discrimination laws have been implemented to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals in employment, housing, and other areas. However, even in countries with legal protections, LGBTQIA+ individuals still face significant challenges, including bullying and harassment in schools, discrimination in healthcare, and barriers to legal recognition of their gender identity.

In other countries, being LGBTQIA+ is still criminalized, and LGBTQIA+ individuals face significant risks of violence, imprisonment, and even death. Some countries have taken steps to decriminalize homosexuality and protect LGBTQIA+ rights, while others have passed even more restrictive laws. Transgender rights have also come to the forefront in recent years, with many countries now recognizing the right of transgender individuals to legally change their gender identity and access medical care and other support. There is still a long way for LGBTQIA+ individuals to live with complete legal protection, social acceptance, and access to essential services. This includes advocating for legal and policy changes, providing support and resources to LGBTQIA+ individuals, and working to change societal attitudes and norms around gender and sexuality.

1.2.1 LGBTQIA+ rights in India

In India, transgender individuals were officially recognized as a third gender by the Supreme Court in 2014, in a landmark judgment that recognized their fundamental rights to equality, non-discrimination, and freedom of expression. This recognition as a third gender was seen as a significant step forward for transgender rights in India. It was hoped that it would provide legal protection and promote social inclusion for the transgender community. Following the Supreme Court judgment, the Indian

² LGBTQIA+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual plus

government passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2019 to provide legal recognition and protection for transgender individuals. The law prohibits discrimination against transgender individuals in areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and access to public spaces. It also allows transgender individuals to legally change their gender identity without undergoing sex reassignment surgery. It provides for creating welfare boards to address issues faced by the transgender community.

However, the law has been criticized by many transgender activists and organizations for its failure to address the needs and concerns of the transgender community adequately. Some of the criticisms of the law include the lack of consultation with the transgender community in its drafting, the absence of provisions for affirmative action and reservations in education and employment, and the criminalization of begging by transgender individuals. Additionally, implementation of the law has been slow and uneven, with many transgender individuals still facing significant discrimination and marginalization in society. The law has also been challenged in court by transgender activists and organizations, who argue that it does not adequately protect the rights and interests of the transgender community.

1.2.2 LGBTQIA+ rights in the USA

Transgender rights in the United States have evolved significantly over the years, although the community still faces ongoing challenges and struggles. Some of the critical laws and policies that have impacted transgender individuals in the US include:

1. The Civil Rights Act of 1964: This law prohibits discrimination based on sex, which has been interpreted by some courts to include discrimination against transgender individuals.
2. The Affordable Care Act (ACA): The ACA prohibits healthcare providers and insurance companies from discriminating based on gender identity, including denying coverage for transition-related care.
3. Title IX: This federal law prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive federal funding, which the Biden administration has interpreted to include discrimination based on gender identity.

4. The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act: This law added gender identity as a protected category under federal hate crime law.
5. Executive orders: Several US presidents have issued executive orders prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity in federal employment and contracting.
6. State laws: Several US states have enacted laws protecting transgender individuals from discrimination in various areas, including employment, housing, and public accommodations.

However, despite these legal protections, transgender individuals still face significant discrimination and violence in the United States. The Trump administration, for example, rolled back many of the Obama-era protections for transgender individuals, and several states have passed laws targeting transgender people, including laws banning transgender girls and women from competing in sports and laws restricting access to gender-affirming medical care for minors. While there have been significant strides in transgender rights in the United States, a great deal must be done to ensure that transgender individuals can live with dignity, respect, and complete legal protection.

1.3 Why it is relevant?

Lambros Malafouris (2014) states that human intelligence spreads beyond the skin into the culture and the material world. He propounds that minds and things are continuous and interdefinable processes rather than isolated and independent entities. He highlights the importance of the role of the material world in cognition, hence memory. Braidotti (2013) reinvigorates the thinking of the basic unit of reference for our species foregrounding the relationship between animate and inanimate. Recent developments in quantum physics suggest the turn to matter. Karan Barad's work on agential realism proposes that agency lies in the interimplication of the material and the discursive world. By drawing from the work of Karan Barad's agential realism, Jagger (2015) expanded the feminists' views on new materialism, highlighting the role of the body's materiality in the constitution of gender. These developments in quantum physics, critical theory, cognitive archaeology, and philosophy have problematized our understanding of gender as a social, cultural, and political construct by foregrounding the material world's role as well as how social, political, and cultural contexts are materialized.

Butler proposes that Queer theory dismantles normative gender identities and associates gender with performativity. Moe Meyer says that Queer theory is "an ontological challenge that displaces bourgeois notions of the Self as unique, abiding, and continuous while substituting instead a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous, and processual constituted by repetitive and stylized acts" (1994). These theorists have problematized the understanding of gender as a static capability through Queer lives. The twenty first century is witnessing tremendous changes with respect to LGBTQIA+ rights and recognition in countries all over the world. Furthermore, we are observing a change in LGBTQIA+ memory collectives through cultural commemorations like the Pride march, and the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people in politics as well as in top institutional positions. Material acts like Pride marches, drag shows, policy enactments, law amendments, and recognition of Queer life invigorate the thinking of the material world's role in the constitution of gender. By doing so, this study also seeks to understand the convergence of the collective and the individual in transgender lives; therefore, it analyses the autobiographies of transgender, transsexual, and intersex people experiencing these changes. The book aims to; explain how material objects shape the affective, sensory, and embodied dimensions of autobiographical remembering in these narratives, demonstrate the mutually constitutive quality of material objects in human life by bridging the gap between human and object, nature and culture, and the tangible and intangible divides, understand how the study of quotidian memories reveals how social, cultural, material, and political contexts influence remembering and dis-remembering, and investigate how bodies mediate collectively constructed dominant memory models of gender while serving as a site of contestation for personal and collective dimensions of autobiographical remembering in trans and intersex people's lives.

1.3.1 Pertinent Questions

This study discusses the following questions,

1. How is castration anxiety manifested differently in transgender, transsexual, and intersex people's lives?
2. What are the different models of remembering enacted in the chosen narratives?
3. How does memory act as a medium, material, and metaphor in transgender, transsexual, and intersex people's lives?

4. How are the chosen life narratives acting as material agents in the lives of the narrators?
5. How did this study de-pathologize gender dysphoria, congenital adrenal hyperplasia, and androgen insensitivity syndrome in the chosen study?
6. How do the prosthetic materials, silicon breasts, and didoes deconstruct the human matter divide in the chosen narratives?
7. How do these narratives deconstruct heteronormative sexual intercourse?
8. What are the forms of forgetting that are evident in the chosen narratives?
9. How can the gender assemblage be expanded to include more discursive and material phenomena?
10. How are the social, political, and cultural contexts materialized in the lives of the narrators?

1.4 Autobiographies Chosen for This Research and The Rationale

The twenty first century is witnessing tremendous changes with respect to LGBTQIA+ rights and recognition in countries all over the world. Assmann & Assmann (2010) states that 'cultural memory is a form of collective memory that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural, identity.' On a social level, groups do not have a memory of their own but tend to make one through the meaning of things such as reminders, celebrations, commemorations, rituals, museums, libraries, and archives. LGBTQIA+ memory collectives are remediated through commemorations like the Pride march, the commemoration of the Stonewall Riot, and drag shows foregrounding the collective memory of LGBTQIA+ people. Individual memories are just fragments. It will become true memory only in its collective representations. In other words, it is realized only in collective remembering. In order for a remembering to take place, the social frameworks or the groups the individual belongs to offer a template for remembrance.

Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith (2010) proposed that *memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency* constitute any life narrative. Memories are the primary archival source for any life narrative, but life narratives involve active reconstruction of the past in the present. Saunders (2010) implies that life writing is the mediation of individual memories more than a testimony to it. Letters, diaries, travel narratives, autobiographies, and first-person narratives are devoted to producing and representing sociability. Any autobiography would give insight into the culturally specific configurations in remembering any event of the past and can be tessellated with the memories of people belonging to that culture as well as act as the component of that culture's memory or its reflection. Therefore this study analyses the autobiographical writings of transgender, transsexual, and intersex people to understand how cultural memories of LGBTQIA+ people have been embodied in their narratives as well as the convergence between the individual and collective memories. By doing so, this study brings attention to the material dimensions of remembering as well as the role of the material world in the construction of gender.

This study analyses the following full-length autobiographies: *A Truth About me* by Revathi, *Sissy* by Jacob Tobia, *The gift of Goddess Lakshmi* by Manobi Bandyopadhyay, *Just Add Hormones* by Matt Kailey, *Intersex* by Thea Hamilton, and *XOXO* by Kimberley, as well as eighteen short autobiographical reminiscences: *Family man* by Devor, H, Aaron, *Without Lou, who would I be?* By Smith, Brice, *Transboyhood* by Whitley, C.T., *The Performance* by Vena, Daniel, *Remember* by Burgin, R, Ezekiel, *Dimension Z* by Shah, Rayees, *Masculine vulnerabilities and human connection* by Cannon, Loren, *Manning Up* by, LaDue Shannon, *Moving Forward* by Woodward, C, Michael. *Reflections* by HDG, *My Journey as a transgender woman with Autism* by Graham, k, Elizabeth, *A Letter to My Parents* by Qwyrdo, *I'm just me* by James, Ben., *Suicide* by Smith, *Jolle* from the books *Hung Jury*, *Manning up* and *Spectrums*. The full-length autobiographies demonstrate the mutability of cultural memories over the life span of the author as well as trace the material world's role in quotidian life events. The short reminiscences help to trace the entailed materiality associated with defining (transition) life moments in transsexual and intersex people's lives.

The book is divided into the following sections. Chapter 2 is concerned with the discussion of the existing scholarship on gender studies, autobiography studies, memory studies, and new materialism. Chapter 3 analyzes the following full-length transgender autobiographies, *A Truth About me* by Revathi, *Sissy* by Jacob Tabia, and *The gift of Goddess Lakshmi* by Manobi Bandyopadhyay, in terms of memories, materialities, and ecologies of

remembering. Chapter 4 analyzes a short autobiography *Just add Hormones* by Matt Kailey, and eighteen short autobiographical slices from the books *Hung Jury*, *Manning Up*, and *Spectrums* in terms of memories, materialities, surgeries, and neurodivergence. Chapter 5 is concerned with analyzing full-length intersex autobiographies, *Intersex* by Thea Hamilton and *XOXO* by Kimberley, in terms of memories, materialities, surgeries, neurodivergence, and ecologies of remembering. The chapters are organized in such a way as to demonstrate how the proposed 'transgender-assemblage' is open-ended, dynamic, and flexible for new connections as and when the analysis progresses, foregrounding how gender is situated in the intra-actions between bodies, ideas, memory, practises, social formations, and objects.

EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP ON GENDER STUDIES, AUTOBIOGRAPHY STUDIES, MEMORY STUDIES, AND NEW MATERIALISM

2.1 Introduction

This review is primarily concerned with the review of existing scholarship on gender, autobiographical writing, subjectivity theories, memory studies, new materialism, and available research concerning all of these. The chronology is designed to facilitate an understanding of the choice of the theoretical framework and the explored research gap. The existing scholarship on *Gender Theories* foregrounds the understanding of gender in different epochs and contexts relevant to this study. The section on *Autobiography* discusses the existing scholarship on life narratives and its relevance to memory studies. The *memory Studies* section introduces the field of memory studies and the current theoretical frameworks available for researching memory in the field of humanities and social sciences. The section on *New Materialism* brings forth the recent turn to matter and emphasizes the importance of memory in the new materialist perspective. The last section deals with the currently available research encompassing memory, materiality, and gender that eventually leads to the research gap explored in this study.

2.2 Gender Theories

Post modernism benefits anti-realism and rejects the independent existential reality. It emphasizes the subjectivity, conventionality, and incommensurability of those constructions (Hicks, 559). This tenant of post-modernism was adapted by feminists in their stance against patriarchy and power. Feminism is a theoretical discipline that evolved as a result of mongrelizing with major theoretical approaches and disciplines such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, modernism, and post-modernism (Hicks 4967).

We are constructed socially, the post-moderns argue, and we are, even as adults, not aware of the social construction that underlies the speech we are engaging in. We might feel as though we are speaking freely and making our own choices, but the unseen hand of social construction is making us

what we are. What you think and what you do and even how you think are governed by your background beliefs.

Postmodern feminists firmly believe in the social construction of reality and deny the natural existential reality on its own. Therefore, they deny their socially constructed roles and responsibilities. They also believed that the problems of women all over the world are not the same and there is no possibility of universal sisterhood. The problems of women vary according to the geographical location, culture, and politics of the society where they belong. Therefore, universalizing feminist goals and objectives creates disparity among feminists all over the world. They also invigorated the need for the acknowledgment of differences and diversity in terms of race, class, religion, caste, and creed.

Judith Butler (2011) was the major figure and proponent of third-wave feminism, postmodern feminism, and Queer theory. Her work was groundbreaking in the field of feminist theoretical practices and approaches. She advocates that the judicial power which was supposed to represent women follows certain exclusionary practices and does not follow an inclusionary approach towards representation. She mentions that gender is a textual condition and the major practices followed were the results of these textual representations and vice-versa.

Mary Joe Frug (2014) was another prominent figure propagating postmodern feminism and her emphasis on the textual condition of gender greatly proved the point that language shapes reality. The language that shapes reality was created and constantly shaped by men for promulgating their ideologies and establishing it as the universalist narrative. She said that the reinterpretative capacity of language enables the patriarchal system to dominate and restrict the lives of women.

2.2.1 Masculinities

In her book, "Masculinities", Connell (2005) emphasizes the need for a robust theoretical framework to define masculinity. A theoretical framework that accounts for the body concerning the social, biological, and cultural framework. Connell suggests that hegemonic masculinity is not a given quality but exists only in the act of dominating other masculinities and femininities in a consensual relationship as well as subordinating other masculinities with a combination of force and consent.

R.W. Connell (2005) proposed the theory of hegemonic masculinity as a culturally exalted form of masculinity. He states that hegemonic masculinity exists concerning femininity and other masculinities, however, masculinity is deemed dominant apropos the social group in which it is performed. Hegemonic masculinity is the masculinity hegemonic in a given constructed social relation and its position is always contestable. He defines masculinity as dynamic concerning body reflexive practices. Body reflexive involves the body as a participatory agent in defining masculinity.

According to Connell (2005), the social biologists failed to produce the supporting body of evidence to understand masculinity. Common sense knowledge of the media relies upon the biological differences among gender or the research findings in biology. Social biologists presuppose the body as a machine. It states that the body functions and operates and men are hardwire programmed for aggression, but the author has provided ample examples of the case studies conducted in the medical science research that demonstrates how the people are physiologically or medically aligned to the socially assigned roles or conformed to the socially cultivated roles of gender, as well as how they resist the socially assigned roles of gender.

According to Connell (2005), men can be categorized into three types: men who want to assert their masculinity through their culturally defined bodily action, men who accept and redefine masculinity in their terms apropos of their limitations, and men who reject hegemonic masculinity as a practice and promote a counter-movement. Skill and work are other dimensions in defining masculinities. Working men's bodily capacities are their economic assets in defining their masculinities but skills are the assets for the modern technologist in the twentieth century. Therefore, the variables identifying masculinity are constantly changing over each epoch, but the body remains the underlying constant. Bodies are objects and agents of practice, the structure that results out of how practice appropriates and defines the body – this forms a pattern beyond social theory (Connell, 96). Thus, a definition of masculinity involves the participation of the body. In a nutshell, he says that any masculinity is defined and embodied in a bodily practice.

2.2.2 Gay, Lesbian, and Queer theories

The lesbian and gay liberation movement originated in the stonewall riots of 1970 where the occupants in a gay bar resisted a police ride. It advocated for two main strategies: resistance to persecution and discrimination against homosexuals, and freedom to explore their sexuality. Freud (2017) and Foucault (1990) are the major influences on gay and lesbian theorists. In

Three Essays on the Theory of 'Sexualities, Freud (2017) proposed that it is not self-evident that men should have a sexual orientation towards women. Even though Freud accepts the plurality of sexuality, he was perceiving homosexuality as a disorienting illness.

Foucault (1990) in his three-volume history of sexualities proposed that “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (1990). In Foucault’s work, power was shown to be predominant in the production and control of sexuality. Later theorists such as Jonathan Dollimore (1991) move further beyond Freud and Foucault and propose that “pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another. They seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement” (Dollimore 1991).

Adrienne Rich (1980) in her essay *compulsory heterosexuality and Lesbian existence* challenges the normativity of heterosexuality by saying that the source of lesbianism is that girl children are born to a woman and hence the reason for same-sex attachment. In contrast, Wittig (1992) rejected the same-sex identification of Rich by saying that lesbians wanted to challenge the heterosexual systems of thought. Rich further developed her concepts and propounded that women bonding is not because of same-sex attachment but to generate collective resistance against patriarchy.

Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex Is Not One* (1985) redefines sexuality based on differences arguing that “Woman does not have sex. She has at least two of them . . . Indeed, she has more than that. Her sexuality, always at least double, is, in fact, plural” (Irigaray 1985). The concept of *woman-identification* was further challenged by lesbian feminists, Black and Third World critics. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (2022) suggest that the concept of *women Identification* was used to mask differences among women. They proposed an inclusive model of lesbianism, which encompasses connections between different cultures and ethnicities. The diverse strategies, intersection of postmodern discourses, as well as lesbian criticism, have led to the textualization of lesbian identity as *queer heterosexist discourse*.

The term *Queer* was reclaimed by a different set of political activists in the late 90s. *Queer Theory* offers a radical revisioning or rethinking of the relationship between marginality, subjectivity, sexuality, and representation. The emergence of postmodernism has paved the way for the realization of Queerness as well as identifying the intersectionality in

identities because the development of post-modern aesthetics has made it possible for gay, lesbian, and Queer theorists to express the marginality and plurality in gender. This later led to the development of gender studies and gay studies which naturally led to the development of men's studies which were founded on the former.

Queer Theory has drawn on Foucault and Dollimore's (1991) idea of perverse dynamics to undermine the binary oppositions between essentialist and anti-essentialist. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler are the two major figures in Queer theory. Butler proposes that Queer theory dismantles the normative gender identities and associates gender with performativity. Moe Meyer says that Queer theory is "an ontological challenge that displaces bourgeois notions of the Self as unique, abiding, and continuous while substituting instead a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous, and processual constituted by repetitive and stylized acts" (Meyer 1994).

Queer theorists such as David Halperin (2002) and others have questioned the relationship between sexuality, identity, and politics. Wittig's (1992) influence on queer theory was substantial, she proposed in her book *The straight Mind* to reject the labels *Men* and *Women*. She wanted to break the relationship between gender and sexuality by saying that both of them are cultural constructs.

2.3 Autobiography

In *Reading Autobiography – A guide for Interpreting Life narratives* Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith (2010) talk about the complexity of life narratives and their constituents. They propose that *memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency* are the constituents of any life narrative. Memories are the primary archival source for any life narrative, but life narratives involve active reconstruction of the past in the present. They mentioned techniques of remembering change over the ages. They said that how and what people remember, and who does the remembering, is determined both historically and culturally.

Susan Engels (2000) suggests that memory is contextual and situated. Life writing also exhibits the grand narrative qualities of the era and the implications of the master narratives in individual memories. There might be often versions of the same event in different life narratives. Places or sites of memory suggest contexts for life narrators. Techniques of remembering changed over the ages from diaries, books, photographs, and

memory rooms to digital spaces. Every act of remembering is implicated in materiality “whether it be the materiality of sound, stone, text, garment, integrated circuits, and circuit boards, or the materiality of our very bodies—the synapses and electrons of our brains and our nervous systems” (Smith, Watson 21). Memory is also evoked by different senses and objects that can be found in life narratives.

Smith and Watson (2010) talk about the traumatic dimension of memory in autobiographies; where the narrator finds a medium to speak the unspeakable, it is termed as *Scriptotherapy*. Also, therapeutic writing offers a form of collective relief to the readers and helps them to establish belongingness. In the process of reading or listening to an autobiographical narrative, we listen to the performance of remembering and conscious forgetting. Certain narrators draw attention to forgotten times and irretrievable stakes of forgetting in their narratives. The same stories retold at different times offer different insights into the cultural transformations and historical moments of the epochs. They proposed that identity and experience in a life narrative are discursive and conditioned by historical moments and cultural transformations.

Bruno Zerweck in his study on *Narrative unreliability* mentioned that it is a phenomenon situated at the crossroads of different fields and disciplines such as narratology, ethics, epistemology, linguistics, psychology, and cognitive theory (2001). He mentioned that all the models of unreliable narration depend on three core elements: authorial agency, narrated or narrator’s utterances, and the reader thus led to the conclusion that the study of unreliable narration sprawls beyond the text. Unrealizability is constituted by a conflicting awareness that a reader can verify the data given by the author in the narration against the real time data. From a cognitive perspective, the encoding of the author and the decoding of the reader encompasses different historical and cultural frames of references. Unreliable narration is concerned with narrator, and the narrative act which eventually touches on the semantic, cognitive, pragmatic, and mental dimensions of the narrative. Within these dimensions, the following three aspects are furthermore considered; *alethic*, *epistemic*, and the *axiological*, which means what is said, how it is concluded, and evaluated. It confirms the presence of the reliable other. He concluded that unreliable narration cannot be analyzed without recourse to its function and effects. Both rhetorical and cognitive narratological studies highlight the wide range of cognitive, ethical, and philosophical implications of unreliable narration.

In the case of autobiographies, the narrated *I* and the narrating *I* are two unique entities in terms of not only cognition but also ethics, morality, and values. The narrated *I* is the appropriation or reconstruction on which the narrating *I* is now engaged. The suggested author and narrator notion can therefore be utilized to deduce the flesh and blood author's intentions for the book. In contrast to fiction, the narrated *I* depicts the FAB author's intentions, whereas the implied author as we interpreted it from the text and the reader's conception is the reconstruction of the narrating *I*'s personal recollections that occur during both the writing and reading processes. At the time of reading, it becomes a co-construction. The act of writing or speaking an autobiography is an act of sharing memories. Once shared, memories become amenable to reconstruction and deconstruction. Adopting Booth, W. C. (1991), Phelan, J., & Rabinowitz, P. J. (1994), and Culler, J. (1975) approach to narrative theory for reading the autobiographical text, the implied author is a manifestation of authorial norms and values; consequently, the implications of present goals in writing the autobiography become apparent. The narrating *I* serves as a bridge between the FAB author's history and the narrative's present. By analyzing the quotidian recollections of the selected narrators, the study clarifies the objectives of their autobiographical works.

Life narrative connects the materiality of the body, subjectivity, and memory. Paul John Eakins argues that our existence inside and as a body shapes our identity. "Subjectivity is impossible unless the subject recognizes her location in the materiality of an ever-present body" (Damasio 239). Watson and Smith (2010) suggest that the narrating body is situated at the nexus of language, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and other specificities. They described the body in different terms such as a neurochemical system, anatomical body, imaginary anatomy, and a socio-political body. Body and skin as sites of departure are evident in the life narratives of trans people writing from diverse topographies. Overall, the writers concluded that identity and subjectivity are fragmented, mutable, and in a constant flux, hence autobiographies should be read as performative acts.

In *An Epistemological approach to trans autobiography*, Sarah Ray (2019) investigated trans autobiographies using a standpoint epistemological framework. She analyzed the texts in three ways: as historical artefacts, literary texts, and theoretical materials. Her analysis was all about how trans autobiographies are consistently resisting or challenging the dominant discourses of gender and how trans autobiographies can influence social and cultural change rather than vice versa. She accounts for the standpoint or

the cultural and social position of the writer in interpreting autobiographies. Her analysis demonstrates how the individual and the collective intersects as well as being interdependent.

2.4 Subjectivity

According to Freud (2009), heterosexual normativity is not a fixed and predictable path dictated by nature. It is the complex series of developments within the subject himself, which remains problematic and unresolved. He says that a typical man wants to prove his masculinity repeatedly to overcome the fear of castration through established ways. This is the postmodern revision of psychoanalysis. He goes on to claim that the girl feels that she is already castrated and wanted to substitute that feeling of loss of penis with a baby. He says that gender, sexuality, and the body are the three things that define subjectivity as ambiguous, unstable, and threatening.

Foucault's (1980) theory of subjectivity implies that subjectivity is the relationship between subject and power.

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (Foucault 1980, p.98)

His idea of a subject serves as a preamble to the forthcoming theories and ideologies of selfhood. His practice of sadomasochism and the subversion of normative sexualities allows gender theories to explicate the impositions of dominant models of power on selfhood.

Freud defines subjectivity in terms of tightly knit inequalities in bourgeois families and projects each position in the oedipal triangle as the product of gender and power. Subjectivity is defined in terms of gender and sexuality, primarily. Sexuality and gender are nothing, but political issues defined and reinforced by political institutions, establishments, and mobilizations. Therefore, the specific focus on the issue of sexuality draws attention to race, class, gender, and other politics. Freud says, “No healthy person, it

appears, can fail to make some addition that might be called perverse to the normal sexual aim; and the universality of this finding is in itself enough to show how inappropriate it is to use the word perversion as a term of reproach" (Freud 1977, p.74).

Foucault deconstructs the idea of having a natural quantifiable sexual nature. He says that it is the work of power to manage us easily. According to him, repression is not the mechanism by which power operates in the case of sexuality but by the act of classification. Eventually, it contributes to our subjectivity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) defines sexual orientation as follows:

It is a rather amazing fact that of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include the preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc., etc., etc.), precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged from the turn of the a century and has remained, as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of 'sexual orientation'. (Sedgwick 1990, p.8)

Foucault proposes that the Freudian approach of reading any gesture or preoccupation as the manifestation of sexual meanings and sexuality leads to the identification of gender and sexuality as a vital component of subjectivity. The late modern and postmodern eras have opened up the possibilities of expressing sexuality freely. "Locality, nationality, family name, and class have lost their ability to define us, yet in our individuality, markers of health, hygiene, correctness, and sexuality have become the most visible ways in which we are classified, and through which we classify each other" (Mansfield 2000, 122). Foucault goes on to say that freedom to express sexuality is not a liberating phenomenon but the very idea of associating sexuality to subjectivity is the successful product of power/knowledge.

Foucault wanted to deconstruct the authority of sexuality in subjectivity by suggesting that our sexuality is not dictated by nature but by a complex set of power relations, social norms, and dominations. Mansfield proposes, according to Freud and Foucault, that it is very difficult to separate subjectivity from sexuality. "Subjectivity had no absolute, universal or consistent content, but it did appear as a regular position in cultural production and social life" (Mansfield 2000, 148). This was based on Foucault's argument that he developed in the latter part of his career.

Deleuze and Guattari did not reject the notion of subjectivity at all. They propose that the essential truth and understanding do not end with understanding the internal structures of an object or a reality but in understanding the endless interplay, and interpenetration of multiple dynamicity in a transitory relationship called *assemblages*. They see the *unconscious* as not something that lacks or is lost but is the production of new and dynamic possibilities and that is called *Schizoanalysis*. Hence Mansfield (2000) proposed that subjectivity is not a structure built around a stable structure but an unmapped exterior that demands endless new connections, possibilities, and expansions as explained by Deleuze and Guattari.

The rhizome is the botanical metaphor used by Deleuze and Guattari to denote the uncertainty and the plurality of origins in contrast to the fixed stable entity of a tree. It denotes the endless, multiple intersections of different orders and the line that divides one order from another becomes permeable. Their example of wasp and orchid, where the wasp becomes the reproductive organ of the orchid, explains the process of *becoming* in their relationship. Unlike arborescent models, rhizomes do not propose to provide permanent structures across time and place but ever-changing, dynamic, renewed, and mutable orders. The dynamic expansion of the possibilities of the being by rejecting the natural and cultural, mind and matter, desire, and act, human and animal, and any binaries for that matter, echoes the pluralities and multiplicities in understanding any phenomenon.

2.5 Life-Writing and Autobiography

In “Life writing and Autobiography” Max Saunders analyzes life writing from cultural memory’s perspective. He implies that life writing is the mediation of individual memories more than a testimony. ‘Recently letters, diaries, and travel narratives, all of which are heavily invested in the production and representing of sociability...’ (Saunders 2010, 343). Any autobiography would give insight into the culturally specific configurations in remembering/representing a childhood or any event of the past and can be tessellated with the memories of people who belong to that culture and act as the component of that culture’s memory or its reflection. Thus, autobiographies contribute to social production and vice versa.

In his essay, “Autobiography as Defacement,” Paul De Man ‘emphasized that autobiography is not a genre at all but a form of reading’ (Saunders 2010, 343). Hence the term ‘autobiography’ implies that any form of writing