

Exclusion of Trans Identity (X) from and its Implications in a Theo-Patriarchal Society: A Queer Reading of Sofia Humayun's It's Not Ok Not-to-Be-Ok

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Abstract

This research explores how transgender people are denied social acceptance in Sofia Humayun's (2024) short story It's Not Ok Not--to-Be-Ok within the context of theo-patriarchal societies. They are not granted any recognition, rights, or opportunities in social, legal, and economic spheres. This study employs qualitative interpretative methods within the queer theoretical frame, which challenges heteronormative gender arrangements, to interpret Humayun's narrative with secondary data support drawn extensively from gender studies, sociology, law, and religious studies. The study employs critical discourse analysis for data analysis to show theo-patriarchal discourses on trans identities as constructed, erased as deviance, yet revealing space for resilient survival. The results outline the all-encompassing social isolation suffering from legal discrimination, economic exclusion, and psychological torment. The study proposes documentary media and literature that portray transgender people positively and preemptively to counter negative perceptions through legal reforms, integrated education, community action, and proactive engagement to promote acceptance and equity.

Key words: Acceptance; Social Isolation; Queer Theory; Heteronormative

Introduction

Transgender individuals, across the world, face discrimination, trouble and harassment due to strong cultural, religious and social gender norms. The theo-patriarchal cultures enforce just male and female, excluding non-binary genders, who experience stigma and exclusion. They refuse to accept transgender existence and discourage any expressions of these identities as wrong or out of place (Butler, 2004; Stryker, 2017; Hughto et al., 2015; Sloan, 2021). The consequent non-acceptance of the "X" gender identity as real in society brings about serious problems for transgender people in every walk of life. By using queer interpretation of Sofia Humayun's work, this study investigates how trans identity is neglected in theo-patriarchal societies and how the struggles and miseries of transgender people are shown.

The theo-patriarchal system, which links religion with a patriarchal system, privileges men and controls women; it criminalizes and stubbornly rejects any 'unmasculine' or 'unfeminine' behavior (Kandiyoti, 1988; Mahmood, 2005). In the theo-patriarchal societies, gender means more than an identity; it is regulated by religion and people in power. Transgender people break the male-female binary and question the dominance of patriarchy and established religion (Namaste, 2000).

Consequently, trans individuals experience rejection and a loss of rights; they are often left out of society. Exclusion of trans people not only makes their life miserable, but it also makes those people to whom transgender individuals are born face difficulties in their families and at school; they (trans people and their families), through legal and financial barriers, lead lives full of hardship and resilience (Grant et al., 2011; James et al., 2016).

Sofia Humayun's short story, *It's Not Ok Not-to-Be-Ok* gives a detailed and personal look at these struggles. A transgender person's story is followed as they face challenges from authority, religion, and public judgment. Their abilities in the kitchen might impress people, but their identity means they cannot enjoy the advantages open to either men or women. Such fictional portrayals reflect that transgender individuals face far greater difficulties in unemployment, poverty, and social isolation (James et al., 2016; Poteat et al., 2016). Having no other means to live, transgender people around the globe usually go into sex work and related activities because they cannot find secure work and are denied formal job offers (Versey et al., 2019; Hughto et al., 2025). Such contradictions reflect how transgender identities are stereotyped, making them vulnerable and subject to cruelties.

Meyer (2003) explains in minority stress theory that the ongoing pressure from stigma, prejudice, and discrimination can make the mental health of transgender people worse. Humayun expresses how required conformity to gender binaries causes the protagonist's mind to split, and they (the trans protagonist) remain confused as an individual. Serano (2016) writes that gender trauma happens when people suffer from social rejection as they live in bodies or are known to people with identities they are not. Reforms like Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 are opposed as they go against the current patriarchal and religious opposition to transgender rights (Fazeel et al., 2025; Khan & Riaz, 2021). Leaders in religion and conservative groups often actively try to halt laws that protect or accept transgender persons; they claim these reforms undermine morality (Jaspal, 2019).

Abbas (2021) and Jagose (1996) point out that discrimination and marginalization of transgender people in societies that favor men are best seen in education, jobs, and recognition is caused in large part by strong traditions and beliefs supporting male dominance. A transgender person's abilities in the kitchen might impress people, but their identity means they cannot enjoy the advantages open to men and women. James et al. (2016) view that fictional portrayals reflect that transgender individuals face far greater difficulties in unemployment, poverty, and social isolation (Poteat et al., 2016). The denial of transgender identity or "X" affects transgender people's lives and status in society; it affects their mental well-being, financial opportunities, and legal situation. *It's Not Ok Not-to-Be-Ok* by Sofia Humayun brings to light what and how transgender people suffer, encouraging readers to face the problems caused by strict gender rules and religious-patriarchal systems. She demonstrates how some societies criticize and humiliate transgender people publicly, but secretly treat them as sex objects. The short story, *It's Not Ok Not-to-Be-Ok*, depicts the embarrassment of transgender people at traffic signals, at weddings, and baby birth ceremonies when they barge there to make money. She further depicts how patriarchy and representatives of religion take away transgender identities and refuse rights to them. The clergy, along with patriarchy, restricts transgender people's lives and jobs. They are dropped from school and banished from society; their rights are denied to them.

The study intends to examine transgender people in South Asia, specifically Pakistan, as it recognizes that the gender diversity beyond the man/woman binary has a history in different traditions, though the current colonial and patriarchal systems criticize it (Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2010). A close reading, alongside theoretical and legal observations, of the contemporary literature adds to the discussion as it depicts real-life, emotional insights into exclusion and trauma, and resistance to trans identity. The current study examines how transgender people are excluded and what they face as humans within the framework of queer theory, to better change the society and accept more than man and woman as gender.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach rooted in interpretative analysis to explore the exclusion of transgender identity (“X”) within theo-patriarchal societies as depicted in Sofia Humayun’s short story *It’s Not Ok-to-Be-Ok*. The qualitative method is particularly suited to this research because it enables an in-depth examination of cultural, social, and religious narratives that quantitative methods may not adequately capture. By using this approach, the study intends to analyze the ethnographic details along with the socio-cultural frameworks that highlight the processes and systems of transgender marginalization within patriarchy and religion as depicted in Sofia Humayun’s short story *It’s Not Ok-to-Be-Ok*. The primary data source for this research is the literary text of Humayun’s short story. It explores the broad and intimate glimpse of the life challenges of a transgender individual within a theocratic patriarchal society. This fiction serves as a rich narrative literature illustrating life and people in society for sociocultural analysis. In addition to the primary source, the research makes use of a wide array of literature on sociology, psychology, law, religious studies, gender, queer theory, and other secondary scholarly literature which contextualizes, interprets, and analyzes exclusion, stigma, and resilience about transgender people.

This study is integrated employing queer theory which focuses on the criticism of socially constructed gender and sexual norms, particularly the two opposing sexes paradigm seared into the psyche by religion and patriarchy. Queer theory critiques dominant cultural discourses that sustain heteronormativity and gender conformity, alongside Stryker (2017), focuses on the erasure of noncompliant identities that fail to fit within these boxes. This line of reasoning is important for understanding the absence and the problematization of transgender identity within the theocratic patriarchal structure working in and around Humayun’s imagination.

The research applies critical discourse analysis on the intersection of social powers and dominations concerning language practices with the case of trans body politics feminist discourse looking at the neglect and branding of transgender people in a sociological framework which is patriarchal and regulated by religion (Greenham, 2019). This approach allows *It’s Not Ok-to-Be-Ok* to analyze the meaning and the symbols that are conveyed through discourse in relation to the construction of transgender identity under patriarchy which perceives transgender people as either pathological or absent.

During the whole research, queer theory operates as a critical and conceptual framework. It directs the analysis on the inversion of transgender identities by surrogacy, pathologization, and erasure under theo-patriarchal cultural hegemony. By destabilizing the male/female binary, queer theory facilitates a reading of Humayun’s story that centers transgender subjectivity and contests exclusionary social practices. Moreover, it positions the protagonist’s experiences within larger socio-political struggles for transgender recognition and rights, ensuring that the analysis contributes not only to literary studies but also to social justice and policy discussions. This application of queer theory ultimately allows the study to engage in ongoing conversations about gender diversity, religious hegemony, and the pressing need for inclusive social transformation.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This analysis examines and explains the main beliefs and forces influencing the current research and the way Humayun writes about transgender people’s marginalization. Regardless of the large body of existing knowledge on issues related to stigma, laws, exclusion, and being trans, little has been studied about the various forms of exclusion that come from cultures where religion and patriarchal beliefs are strongly linked in her short story, *It’s Not Ok Not-to-Be Ok*. Most of the research breaks down transgender experiences into legal, cultural, or health topics, and few studies combine these topics as viewed by queer theory. However, little attention has been paid to these forms of exclusion in literary works. This gap indicates why we need the present research, which

explores how transgender people face exclusion in theo-patriarchal societies using both theory and published works.

Hughto et al. (2015) and Sloan (2021) find, in the context of patriarchal religions societal division of gender, stigma, and exclusion that transgender people experience. They suffer depression, loneliness, and face difficulties in accessing healthcare, social recognition, and rights, much as Sofia Humayun described in *It's Not Ok Not-to-Be-Ok*. Such societies favour 'unmasculine' or 'unfeminine' behaviour, which transgender people transgress to question the dominance of patriarchy and established religion. Consequently, trans individuals experience rejection and a loss of rights and exclusion, which make trans people's and their families' lives miserable both within their families and at school (Kandiyoti, 1988; Mahmood, 2005; Namaste, 2000). They, through legal and financial barriers, lead lives full of hardship and resilience (Grant et al., 2011; James et al., 2016). These studies relate to the current study as they depict the exclusion of transgender people from the Theo-patriarchal society. It resists their acceptance to the point that they are denied any and every opportunity in life. A transgender person who can be as good as any other human, male or female, in doing productive jobs like hoteling and managing a kitchen is still a transgender person and is exposed to abuse in a stereotypically patriarchal society. They are denied economic opportunities and exposed to poverty and unemployment. Humayun (2024) writes that they, in their boyhood, "had some effeminate ways" in school and at home; they cooked the best kabobs and [they] flaunted about [their] recipes and [their] aunts laughed and adored [them] (Humayun, 2024, p.156). Better than boys in many respects, they neither yelled to command nor had a gang like other boys at night. They neither do drugs nor hoot on chowks, and were made fun of at schools (Humayun, 2024, p.156). A transgender person with all productive qualities of a human is not acceptable, and a boy with all kinds of evils like doing drugs, hooting on chowk, yelling, commanding, and staying out with gang at night is acceptable. The words "struck off, banish, ostracize" render a transgender person to be living in a "living hell or worldly hell" for no fault of their own; they were just born with a biological syndrome. A patriarchal society is adamant not only against the transgender identity; they are equally against any subaltern like a girl, who is in contact with a faculty member, is struck off, but the faculty member is excused "because that's how men are. They won't change" (Humayun, 2024, p.157). A transgender is permanently ostracized and struck off a patriarchal society for being "not girl enough or boy enough" (Humayun, 2024, p.157).

A transgender person's abilities in the kitchen might impress people, but their destiny is unemployment, poverty, and social isolation; they cannot enjoy the advantages available to men and women (Poteat et al., 2016; Abbas, 2021; James et al., 2016). Transgender people have their rights recognized and protected inconsistently (Ung Loh, 2018). Moazami (2023) outlines the legal frameworks that support transphobia, social exclusion, violence, and opposition to their rights. Rani and Srivastava (2015) argue that patriarchal norms systematically exclude transgender individuals from family, community, education, employment, and legal structures through both formal and informal policies. Kabir and Ahsan (2021) find that in conservative cultures and patriarchal societies, political opposition and religious traditions prevent even women from being fully included, let alone transgender people; they face discrimination in education, work, and medical care, in addition to isolation and physical violence (Saddique et al., 2017).

Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals navigate their beliefs when religious teachings and patriarchal interpretations of those beliefs are employed to stigmatize victims and maintain men's power (Kashubeck-West et al., 2017; Bradley and Kirmani, 2015). Humayun (2024) shares the same experiences through her story, *It's Not Ok Not-to-Be-Ok*. A transgender person, for no fault of their own, cannot fit in a theo-patriarchal society; they are denied every fundamental right, such as schooling and employment in a hotel or kitchen management to survive; body shaming and utter humiliation within the institution of family and society, tear them psychologically. They

must go with the current of society of “healthy community, if they must survive, as ‘there is no X either man or woman or wanton ways’” (Humayun, 2024, pp.161-62).

This study finds Humayun’s story parallel with Ung Loh (2018) and Moazami (2023). The study reveals that Theo-patriarchal society has associated negative connotations with trans individuals; they equate trans individuals with homosexuality. When the 2018 act is passed to give rights to the transgender people and “indirectly purify these signals” where the transgender people beg, or are misused otherwise, there are protests by those who speak the center meta narrative “wanton ways, X, wanton ways, X”; they wear the “horse eye guards” and issue “fatwa” (religious decree)” against the transgender Act (Humayun, 2024, p.159). The actors of Theo-patriarchal society stand not only against Transgender Act 2018, but they also do against the “Domestic Violence Bill” when domestic violence was declared punishable. They excluded the “psychological, emotional, or financial violence” from the domestic violence by equating “a visible mark on the body” with violence. The murders of Noor Makhdoom and Qandeel Balooch were left unaccounted for in the theo-patriarchal society, as they were dismissed as wanton (Humayun, 2024, pp.159-60).

As Saddique et al. (2017) state that the otherwise divided theo-patriarchal society is “sans title, sans party and sans membership, posing for selfies with the ones they chant about wanton ways, wanton ways” when it comes to the rights of transgender people and the Domestic Violence Bill. They are given full media coverage and are “invited on the [TV] shows. The followers of these clergy people are indoctrinated with idea of violence as they cram, applying David Greenham’s (2019) semantic level, “under their breath, no scar, no violence” (Humayun, 2024, p.161). The indoctrination of people regarding transgender people or the transgender Act 2018 continues by hitting “Ameen after Ameen” below the post against the act posted by someone from the “healthy community” (Humayun, 2024, p.161). A transgender person must post “AMEEN in capital letters” to survive in the healthy community of theo-patriarchal society; they (transgender people) have to chant like them that “there is no X. either man or woman or wanton ways” (Humayun, 2024, pp.161-62).

Fuller and Riggs (2018) report on how family helps in transgender people’s mental health and resilience; they also highlight how badly discrimination impacts. Their research underlines how being accepted by the community can ease psychological problems, as Humayun’s story illustrates through his own family and community’s rejection. Meyer (2003) explains that the ongoing pressure from stigma, prejudice, and discrimination causes mental health issues to transgender people. Serano (2016) writes that gender trauma comes from social rejection as they live in bodies or are known to people with identities they are not.

A patriarchal society, being obsessed with male dominance and having boys as kids, usually destroys a transgender person psychologically by giving them, first, a “boys’ haircut” to “satisfy their ego.” When they “grow breasts” enough to reveal in “collar shirts,” they wonder as to how to undo the skills that [they] have been learning since [their] childhood (Humayun, 2024, pp.157-58).

A patriarchal society is usually obsessed with boys; they want boys more than girls to be born to them. A transgender person born to them is psychologically destroyed by dressing as boys and giving them a “boys’ haircut” only to “satisfy their ego” until they “grow breasts” to reveal in “collar shirts” (Humayun, 2024, pp.157-58). They, “cursing X category and wanton ways,” accept them as girls (previously tomboys till adolescence) and wait for some suitor. When neither the suitor turns up nor a girl in the transgender, they are ostracized with “blasphem[ing] the transgender act 2018 and its perpetrators” (Humayun, 2024, p.158). The psychological split accompanied with the physical changes in a transgender are seen in how they (a transgender) “sit in the middle of the night, legs wide apart, dupatta left forsaken on one shoulder, buttons tearing apart from the collar shirt and one hand palming the head, wondering how to undo the skills that you have been learning since [their] childhood” (Humayun, 2024, p.158).

A transgender is not taken as a human but is taken as a “nightmare”; they are given an “identity of an outcaste” (Humayun, 2024, p.158). Anwar et.al. (2023) state that being patriarchal is to deviate even from what is a [biological] fact. In a patriarchal society, the binary of man and woman is so strong that a transgender person is either treated like a tomboy or, then a girl when they grow breasts, but not as a transgender person. They are more treated like a balloon puffed up enough to burst into “shards” and “cling to the society” (Humayun, 2024, p.158).

The study finds, as Poteat et al. (2016) do, that a Theo-patriarchal society does not accept transgender people; it resists their acceptance to the point that they are denied any and every opportunity in life. A transgender person who can be as good as any other human, male or female, in doing productive jobs like hoteling and managing a kitchen is still a transgender person and is exposed to abuse in a stereotypically patriarchal society. They are denied economic opportunities and exposed to poverty and unemployment. Humayun (2024) writes that they, in their boyhood, “had some effeminate ways” in school and at home; they cooked the best kabobs and [they] flaunted about [their] recipes and [their] aunts laughed and adored [them] (Humayun, 2024, p.156). Better than boys in many respects, they neither yelled to command nor had a gang like other boys at night. They neither do drugs nor hoot on chowks, and were made fun of at schools (Humayun, 2024, p.156). A transgender person with all productive qualities of a human is not acceptable, and a boy with all kinds of evils like doing drugs, hooting on chowk, yelling, commanding, and staying out with gang at night is acceptable.

Rani and Srivastava (2015) find that transgender people as “struck off, banished [ed], ostracized [d]” from society and living in a “living hell or worldly hell” for no fault of their own; they were just born with a biological syndrome. A patriarchal society is adamant not only against the transgender identity; they are equally against any subaltern like a girl, who is in contact with a faculty member, is struck off, but the faculty member is excused “because that’s how men are. They won’t change” (Humayun, 2024, p.157). A transgender is permanently ostracized and struck off a patriarchal society for being “not girl enough or boy enough” (Humayun, 2024, p.157), which affects both emotionally and psychologically (Anwar et.al., 2022).

The binary of man-and-woman has implicated a transgender’s life; they cannot adopt a respectable profession in life. They, disguised in mocking femininity, beg “under the glaring sun” (Humayun, 2024, p.154) at the car signals. They beg “sirf 10 rupay (just ten rupees [rupee --- Pakistani currency])” from a lady in one car or make erotic gestures to attract someone in another car, but in vain; they are shooed away in both attempts. Neither their “non-existent cleavage ... show of bangles, twist a lock of curl on each side of [their] ears” nor “Aye haye Baajii! Sirf 10 rupay” helps them (Humayun, 2024, p.154). They are humiliated, even if the ten rupees begged for are given do not come to them, as evident from the “hands fly in t[he] air, lips wobble, body swings, ten rupees note falls and then hugs the fence of the Metro Routes” (Humayun, 2024, p.154). This humiliation of the transgender continues when they go to an air-conditioned black window car; they “bang again on the black window” but “neither do they give a wink back nor even maaf karo baba (forgive me)” (Humayun, 2024, p.154).

As for violence against transgender people, the study findings are in line with those of Saddique et al. (2017). When, after a day-long humiliation, the transgender sits on a U-turn in the evening to take some rest and count what they have earned, The same cars, which reacted derogatively at day time, as Versey et al., (2019) and Hughto et al., (2025) find, ride over them; now, the car holders’ lips do not “wobble” nor their “hands fly, nor their air-conditioned cars black window remain tight closed even though “caked pastry of [their] face has become gooey, mascara and kajal have left smudges eyes and [their] breasts have retreated back after holding them tight for the whole day long. And the cleavage is long gone. Curls have uncurled” (Humayun, 2024, p.155).

Begging with utter humiliation and purchase of their bodies after the sun grows from “gold yellow to orange yellow to black” by the car holders could hardly suffice their needs, a transgender felt bound to “barge in the wedding or baby births to dance” (Humayun, 2024, pp.154-55). Dance, the

only means with some respect to earn a livelihood, as a profession has ceased for them when the insincere patriarchal society stopped them from “breaking in, people shoo [them] away with a few hundred” (Humayun, 2024, p.156).

As Kandiyoti (1988) finds in his study that education, being the fundamental right of all individuals, beyond binaries, is denied to transgender people. Humayun (2024) encompasses the same idea. She writes that a transgender person is denied the right to education in a patriarchal society. They are teasingly made fun of at school and are even scorned. The school council, being from the healthy community, and to keep the community healthy, banishes transgender students from school as it strikes girls off when “caught in washrooms being intimate” or “whose videos were discovered in their own phones” (Humayun, 2024, p.156). Evil, in a patriarchal society, dwells with the subaltern—the girls and the transgender—and are, therefore, kept away from the “healthy community.” Girls with no patriarchally-perceived evils are allowed to get an education; transgender people are, for no inherent evil in them, not allowed schooling and a decent job in the future (Humayun, 2024, p.156).

Conclusion

The study examines the socio-legal structures within the Theo-patriarchal world that systematically erase the existence of transgender identity (“X”). The study describes how rigid patriarchal and religious gender dualism violently oppresses trans persons because of stripping them off any form of social recognition, rights, or opportunities in life. This oppression does not only have social and cultural bases; it is systematically foundational within legal, educational, and political frameworks that promote heteronormativity and, thus, renders transgender people invisible and nude vulnerable. Humayun’s narrative portrays the socioeconomic consequences of rejection from family and society alongside a lack of social support for trans people. From an accepted social standpoint, transgender people are looked down upon irrespective of their position in society, like their adeptness in managing kitchens. It is painful to realize that there is no intellectual space that exists beyond the male/female paradigm vis-a-vis the theo-patriarchal framework. It is not just that the X identity is violently suppressed, but it is equally regarded as some form of social or moral root. Social ostracism like this is accompanied by the withdrawal of fundamental citizenship rights, including education, violence-free protection, and legal advancement, such as The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 and The Domestic Violence Bill. Theologians and patriarchal religious leaders enforce negative attitudes regarding transgender inclusivity by deeming it a violation of decency and social order. From this oppression arises a self-sustaining system of violence, erasure, discrimination, and oppression. The research highlights the continuous efforts of transgender persons to legally acquire their identity amid numerous layers of social suppression. Whatever part of the argument one decides to take, it illustrates the violence of a theologically grounded masculine socio-political system that fundamentally defies the existence of more than two genders. Humayun's work is both a reflection and an eye-opener, a dual portrayal and call to action that exposes and records the existence and plight of transgender people in regions that intentionally seek to erase them.

Recommendations

The violence and discrimination against transgender persons necessitate policy frameworks that are both inclusively devised and tackle the glaring gaps identified. The impact of patriarchy fused with religion as an ideological construct within culture needs urgent attention. Mental health and socioeconomic trans empowerment frameworks ought to be integrated into such policies. Moreover, primary and high school education on gender as subjects needs to be taught to dismantle the ingrained order of patriarchy. And perhaps, the most urgent and crucial is the need for social violence and silence campaigns led by community and religious leaders, for the discourse to hold relevance.

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