

Performing Brandon: Gender and sexual performativity in Kimberly Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry*

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Brandon Teena's fluidity of gender and sexual identity through the lens of gender performativity, as depicted in the film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). This research is driven by an interest in how cinema represents the construction of gender identity, specifically how transgender characters negotiate societal expectations through performance. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, this study examines how Brandon constructs his gender and sexual identity through his appearance, behavior, and interactions, revealing gender as a performative act shaped by repetition and social norms. Qualitative descriptive methods are used, focusing on film analysis to interpret visual and narrative elements such as costume, body movement, dialogue, and cinematography. This study also draws on Brannon and David's theory of masculinity to classify the types of masculinity Brandon performs in a rigid and homophobic environment. In order to support the data, the researcher collects information from diverse sources such as articles, journals, books, and online references that pertain to the gender and sexual performativity experience that Brandon Teena experienced. The findings of this study are expected to shed light on how Butler's gender performativity theory was applied to Brandon Teena's gender and sexual performativity in the film as a transgender character. This study is also practical in terms of providing insight into the topic of gender and sexual performativity in society, as well as allowing Brandon to personally experience how he feels about himself and society.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender is part of self-identity and helps people define who they are. It is generally divided into gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). Gender identity refers to how someone sees themselves as male or female, gender roles are behaviors considered appropriate in a culture, and sexual orientation relates to attraction toward the opposite sex, same sex, or both. These aspects are shaped by social and cultural norms (Wood & Eagly, 2009).

Sex and gender are often considered the same, even though they are different. Sex is biological, while gender is a social construct influenced by culture and expectations (Lorber, 1995). Judith Butler (1990, 1999) argues that gender is not fixed but is performed through repeated actions that become natural over time. This means gender identity goes beyond the male-female binary and is socially constructed. Traditional gender roles, especially in patriarchal societies, define men as strong and independent, while women are expected to be weak and dependent (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Those who do not conform—such as LGBTQ+ individuals—are often marginalized, even though they are an integral part of society and deserve recognition.

Sometimes, biological sex does not match gender identity, leading to experiences of discomfort and transition. For example, Brandon Teena, the main character in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), was biologically female but lived and identified as male. Research shows gender identity can be shaped not only by psychology and behavior but also by biological factors like genetics and hormones (Heylens et al., 2012). Butler (1990) states that all gender identities are formed through repeated performativity rather than being innate. This study uses Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, supported by Brannon and David's masculinity theory, to analyze Brandon Teena's gender and sexual performativity in *Boys Don't Cry*.

Judith Butler says that John L. Austin's theory of language, which says that the way we talk is an action with certain language effects, is where the idea of performativity comes from (Butler, 1990). Philosopher John L. Austin first proposed the idea of performative language, arguing that there are two types of language: constative language and performative language. Butler defines performativity as the process by which we carry out acts of identification as a succession of continuous cultural and social performances as opposed to as expressions of past identities. Butler describes "gender" as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990, at 33). Pennycook (2004) emphasizes two crucial components of Butler's theory: first, performativity creates identities that appear natural through repeated acts; second, these acts take place inside rigorous social frameworks, limiting human choice. Thus, identities emerge through continuing performances rather than free will. Brandon's daily embodiment of masculinity as a transgender man shows this performative process through his physical expressions and behaviors.

Masculinity is defined as a social construct that includes behaviors, language, and practices that are typically associated with men, and are culturally defined as unfeminine. Masculinity is shaped by societal expectations about how men should behave, think, and express emotions, which set boundaries about what is considered appropriate for men in the public and private spheres (Harianti, 2023). Because the concept of masculinity varies by culture, Syulhaji S (2017) contends that numerous cultural rules and traits can be adopted through various media, such as traditional rituals, religion, parenting patterns, types of games, television shows, and reading books given by parents, which can indirectly shape a man's self-image in their life. These conditions can be seen in the way individuals dress, appear, engage in activities, socialize, solve problems, communicate themselves orally and nonverbally, and wear body accessories. To support Brandon Teena's gender performativity, the researcher uses this supporting theory to clearly define how Brandon's actions can be classified as masculine than feminine through the gender performativity he depicted. Masculinity Theory developed by Robert Brannon and Deborah David is one of the important foundations in the study of gender and masculinity. This theory, introduced in the book "The Forty-Nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role" in 1976, identifies four main norms that shape the expectations of traditional masculinity (Brannon & David, 1976).

Previous studies (Mawarni, 2022; Khurosan, 2020) have shown how characters in literature and film express their identities through clothing, behavior, and social interaction, often face both acceptance and discrimination. This study is also expected to give insight into how Butler's theory explains transgender

identity through Brandon's character. It can also help society understand the lived experiences of transgender individuals and the challenges they face. Also, performativity of gender was also conducted by Khurosan (2020) and titled, "Performativitas Identitas Gender dan Seksualitas Dalam Novel Imarah Yakubian Karya Ala Al-aswani". This study examines the performativity of gender identity and sexuality in Imarah Yakubian by Ala al-Aswany. The study looks at how the characters create their gender identity and sexuality as well as how they react to heteronormativity's dominance using Judith Butler's theory of performativity. The results show that homosexual people are marginalized in Egyptian society, which is influenced by heteronormative ideology. Individuals with "deviant" gender or sexual identities react in a variety of ways, such as opposition, negotiation, or conformity. By publicly adhering to social norms, Abduh serves as a symbol of conformity in the book. Hatim al-Rashid shows a more moderate, negotiated style by expressing his actual goals in private settings while conforming to social norms in public.

Some analyses have examined how the film confronts traditional notions that "Boys Don't Cry," challenging the cultural suppression of emotional vulnerability in men. These studies by Asrita & Fauziah (2022) titled "Wacana Maskulinitas Dalam Video Campaign "Boys Don't Cry" Versi White Ribbon" have suggested that the film exposes the harmful consequences of rigid gender roles that prohibit emotional expression, particularly for males. The phrase "boys don't cry" itself has been analyzed as encapsulating a destructive aspect of masculine socialization that encourages men to suppress emotions rather than express vulnerability. Academic work has connected this theme to broader discussions of "toxic masculinity" and its negative impacts on both individuals and society, suggesting that the film serves as a critique of these destructive gender norms.

In conclusion, gender and sexual identity are fundamental aspects of self-identification, influenced by cultural norms, societal expectations, and individual experiences. As seen in the case of Brandon Teena in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), gender and sexual identity are not solely determined by biological sex, but are formed through performative actions that reinforce the chosen identity. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity highlights how repeated behaviors and expressions contribute to the formation of gender and sexual identity over time. Films and studies of gender performativity show how individuals navigate societal constraints, often in the face of stigma, discrimination, or acceptance. Through this analysis, it is evident that gender and sexual identity are complex, fluid, highly personal, and constructed through repeated actions that form an identity to the person itself.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method, a research approach that produces descriptive data derived from the object under examination. Descriptive research enables the researcher to reveal the nature of an individual, condition, or group through fragments of the studied object, which are then analyzed. The qualitative method, in this context, relies on interpretation in descriptive form and focuses on the research outcome, which is the application of gender performativity theory to Brandon Teena's gender and sexual performativity in the film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). The data for this study are obtained from two sources, namely primary and supporting data. The primary data source is the film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), directed by Kimberly Peirce, which serves as the central text for analysis with a focus on Brandon Teena's actions, appearance, and interactions during the formation of his gender and sexual performativity as a transgender individual. Meanwhile, the supporting data source consists of articles, journals, books, and online references that discuss gender and sexual performativity, particularly as they relate to Brandon Teena's experiences through the lens of gender performativity theory.

The data collection process involves several steps. First, the film is watched carefully to identify relevant data and to gain a deeper understanding of the primary source. Second, significant dialogues and scenes are captured, documented, and noted with their corresponding timestamps. Third, the analysis is supported by a variety of secondary sources, such as books, articles, journals, and internet references that focus on applications of gender performativity theory. Once collected, the data are

analyzed to address the research questions: how Brandon Teena's gender and sexual performativity are depicted in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). This analysis combines discourse, narrative, and semiotic approaches to develop a comprehensive understanding of gender and sexual performativity as socially constructed and performed through repeated actions, societal expectations, and institutional influences, in line with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Additionally, Brannon and David's masculinity theory is employed to validate Brandon's masculinity as part of his performativity.

The data analysis process consists of three stages: reducing the data, analyzing the data, and concluding the data. In the data reduction stage, only relevant information related to gender performativity theory and Brandon Teena's gender and sexual performativity is gathered. The analyzing stage applies Butler's gender performativity theory to examine Brandon's physical descriptions, actions, and behaviors as representations of masculinity, supported by Brannon and David's masculinity theory. This helps to uncover how Brandon's gender and sexual performativity is shaped in the film. Finally, the concluding stage summarizes the findings of the analysis to formulate coherent conclusions, validate the research objectives, and ensure the credibility of the study. By aligning conclusions with both the data and theoretical perspectives, the research provides comprehensive answers to the research questions and presents convincing, reliable, and credible findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are two main sections in the results and discussion. The first section discusses how Brandon Teena's gender performativity is portrayed. The second section discusses how Brandon Teena's sexual performativity is portrayed. The concept of Judith Butler's gender performativity theory will be used to explain the process of Brandon Teena's gender and sexual formation in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) with a focus on the theory of gender performativity based on Brandon's appearance, behavior, and relationships. The supporting masculinity theory from Brannon and David (1976) will be used to support the data. Brandon expresses his gender performativity through a masculine appearance shaped by his hairstyle, clothing, and behavior. According to Brannon and David's theory, his masculinity conforms to traditional norms and is reinforced by his environment. Lonny supports this presentation by cutting Brandon's hair and criticizing his appearance, while the rough, male-dominated setting further reinforces his masculine performance. Although Butler separates gender and sexual identity, Brandon's attraction to women and lack of romantic interest in men align with his masculine identity. His pursuit of masculinity reflects a desire for acceptance in a homophobic environment, which shapes every aspect of his self-presentation.

Gender Performativity

This discussion will explore the gender performativity depicted by Brandon Teena. His gender performativity was also influenced by several factors, such as the environment that reinforced the formation of masculine gender and masculinity, which was displayed through Brandon Teena's physical descriptions and behavior. The goal is to determine how Brandon's gender performativity is displayed in the film.

Environment

Lonny, Brandon's cousin, plays an important role in supporting Brandon's identity as a man. By cutting Brandon's hair (picture 3.1), Lonny not only helps physically but also shows emotional support and acceptance of Brandon's choices. According to Butler (1990), gender identity is formed through performative acts that are regulated and recognized in a social context; thus, other people and societal

norms play an important role in constructing one's gender. Such support is crucial during identity transitions, as it gives a sense of security and validation.



Picture 3. 1 Lonny help Brandon cut his hair (2:08)



Picture 3. 2 Tom and John rape Brandon (1:28:32)

To add a masculine touch to his appearance, Brandon took it a step further after cutting his hair short. He tucked a wad of socks into his pants to create a bulge that resembled a penis, a symbolic attempt to perfect his gender identity as a man. This action shows how serious Brandon is about creating a self-image that fits his identity, and also illustrates the pressure he feels to appear like a “real” man in the eyes of others. However, Brandon’s efforts were not entirely successful when his cousin Lonny saw him. Instead of mocking Brandon, Lonny gave a subtle critique and encouraged him to adjust it himself. After Brandon did so, Lonny’s simple comment, “That’s better,” showed support and helped boost his confidence. This moment reflects their close bond and highlights the importance of support in a transgender person’s journey.

Tom and John are Brandon's new friends after he joins Candace after running away from the bar. Tom and John appear friendly toward Brandon, treating him as a new friend and accepting him into their social circle. They laugh together, party, and share a sense of camaraderie, creating the illusion of trust and friendship. John, in particular, displays a cheerful and energetic demeanor, often joking around and engaging Brandon in male bonding rituals such as drinking, racing, or roughhousing. Tom, though quieter and more reserved, also occasionally shows a more approachable side, engaging in casual conversation and appearing to enjoy Brandon’s company. Casual teasing, slang, and rough jokes are part of how men there strengthen their bond. In one scene, Tom jokingly calls Brandon “You dick,” which in their culture is a friendly way to strengthen ties rather than an insult. Brandon laughs along, showing he feels included and comfortable in the group. This moment reflects how humor and shared banter build trust and belonging, allowing Brandon to feel more like one of the men and freer to express his gender.

Brandon's choice to dress and act like a man can be seen as a survival tactic to find acceptance and security in a largely transphobia and homophobic environment, where deviation from gender norms is harshly criticized. His masculine appearance helps him connect with others and gain acceptance within the male community, at least on the surface. However, this fragile acceptance is shattered when his biological sex is revealed through a newspaper article that reveals his true name and identity. This revelation removes the social protection he has carefully constructed, leaving him vulnerable to hostility and violence.

The picture 3. 2 is the most severe consequence of this revelation occurs when John and Tom, who had previously treated him as an equal, sexually punish him by raping him. After they treated Brandon depravedly by forcibly removing Brandon's pants to reveal his real biological sex to prove Lana that she was wrong, Brandon quickly ran away from Lana's house. However, when Brandon had just arrived at the front door of the house, Tom and John beat him and forcibly pulled Brandon into the car. They visited a quiet place with no one around. They forcibly had sex with Brandon in turns. When Brandon was about to rebel, they beat him, so there was no other option but to surrender. After that, they told Brandon not to tell anyone about this, if he did, the price would be his life. Tom and John's aggressive nature can be

seen in how they forcibly harassed Brandon and threatened to end Brandon's life if he told anyone that Tom and John had done something indecent to him which would make a trauma for him.

Because Brandon could not face it alone, he told about the rape that Tom and John had committed on him, which put his life in danger. Tom warned him to stay silent, but Brandon chose to speak out, an act of courage that defied the threats. In response, Tom and John killed Brandon and Candace, while Lana narrowly escaped. This violence reflects Butler's view that those who do not conform to gender norms are punished to enforce the heteronormative order. Within Butler's framework of gender performativity, such acts of violence serve as mechanisms that police and regulate the boundaries of acceptable identities, reinforcing the illusion that only binary gender expressions are legitimate. It also shows how transphobia and homophobia use fear and violence not only against individuals but also to silence supporters. Brandon's story reveals the severe risks faced by those who live outside traditional gender roles in a hostile environment.

Masculinity

A combination of gender behaviors that guarantees a dominant position in gender is called masculinity. Brannon & David (1976) said that a significant aspect of contemporary masculinity is the rejection of everything feminine. Physical descriptions have a huge impact on how we perceive and present people, characters, and objects. Physical descriptions include obvious characteristics such as height, facial features, body shape, hair, and clothing, which help people build mental images. The following physical description of Brandon's character in the movie *Boys Don't Cry* demonstrate his masculinity. Some of the scene clips below relate to (Brannon & David, 1976) concept of masculinity, namely No Sissy Stuff, which is a concept that rejects feminine things and tries to show their masculine side. In this movie it is shown in the way Brandon dresses and his effort to make himself look like a man.



Picture 3. 3 Brandon cuts his hair to look like a boy (01:45)



Picture 3. 4 Brandon is forming his identity (32:07)

Picture 3. 3 shows the start of Brandon's appearance as a man when his nephew Lonny shaves his hair short. For Brandon, who is transgender, short hair is not just a style but a way to match his appearance with his identity and be accepted as male in society. Lonny's support is crucial—by cutting his hair, Lonny helps strengthen his confidence and ability to perform his gender. This moment shows how gender performativity is shaped not only by personal choices but also by the support of others. With Lonny cutting his hair short, it aligns with Brannon's concept of No Sissy Stuff which is a rejection of femininity. This is an attempt at masculinity as its performativity. Haircuts become more than just a style choice; they can be a performance of masculinity, a visible marker of gender transition, and a method of challenging gender norms that confine individuals to a binary framework. In this way, the scene shows how physical appearance, social support, and cultural expectations are intertwined in the lived experiences of transgender individuals.

Brandon's gender identity construction can be seen in this picture 3. 4. Before doing the activity, Brandon got ready first in his room. While getting ready, Brandon took out the tools he usually uses every day and put them on the bed. The tools are a chest binder, fake penis, and socks. In the mirror,

Branon's No Sissy Stuff concept can be seen when Brandon covers up his true biological identity as a woman and constructs his male identity.

One of the biological bodies in women that cannot be avoided is having breasts. However, because Brandon rejects the femininity that women clearly have, he covers it up by flattening his chest to make it look broad. With Brandon's efforts, this can be called a rejection of things related to femininity. Butler also rejects the idea that gender and sexuality are things that are God-given or natural. In this film, it can be proven when Brandon uses a chest flattener, so that his chest looks broad. The picture also shows Brandon adding a bulge to his pants to resemble male genital which Brandon does by reducing the socks. This scene also contains the concept of rejection of a woman's femininity where at birth, a woman's biological body does not have a penis. Because he rejects his female identity, Brandon makes an imaginary penis using socks and puts it in between his pants. By making an imaginary penis, as a transgender, Brandon shows that the bulge in the middle of his pants is a part that must be present in men. One of Brandon's efforts is to form his gender performativity as a trans man which is done repeatedly which is in line with Butler's gender performativity concept saying that gender as a performance is realized through repeated actions, not as an innate trait. Brandon wants himself to be completely male, so he does this to support his performance. Brandon feels uncomfortable with his female gender. This is where gender is seen as dynamic.

Because Brandon identifies himself as a man, he dresses accordingly, as shown in picture 3. 5. He presents himself as a man with masculine clothing in the whole film, which shapes its gender performativity. The way he dresses is a key mechanism for performing gender. With him choosing to dress like a man, this falls under the concept of Brannon No Sissy Stuff, which is his refusing to dress according to his biological sex as a woman. So, this is the same as rejecting anything feminine.



Picture 3. 5 Brandon wears a shirt and trousers (47:15)

Picture 3. 6 Brandon fakes his name to Billy (03:50)

Based on Butler, societal expectations determine certain styles of dress as masculine or feminine, and with repetitive ways of dressing. Because nowadays men wear shirts and trousers repeatedly, society's perception considers that it is normal for men and it will be considered a deviation if they dress differently from the men that society perceives. Brandon considers himself a man, so he tries to fit in with men in general, including the way he dresses. Therefore, the clothes that Brandon usually wears is considered masculine. Some clothing and fashion projects, such as "Gender Performance Clothing," are designed to encourage play and fluidity in gender expression, allowing individuals to actively shape their perception of their bodies and gender identities. For those who do not fit into binary gender categories, clothing becomes a tool for self-expression and challenging rigid social norms. Based on Butler, gender is a result of what others have seen of a person. When Brandon dresses like that, others who see him assume he is a man.

Behavior includes how a person walks, talks, dresses, and interacts with others, all of which are seen as actions that shape gender identity. These behaviors are not determined by biological sex, but are learned and repeated to conform to societal norms and expectations about gender. Behavior in gender performativity is a series of actions and behaviors that are repeated and influenced by society through individuals who perform and embody gender, making gender a continuous and dynamic process, not a fixed state.

As we can see in this picture 3. 6, to establish his identity as a man, when he wanted to date a woman, Brandon, whose real name is Teena Ray Brandon, faked his name to 'Billy', by saying, "I'm Billy are you Nicole?". This seemingly simple act of name change carries significant weight in the context of gender identity and performativity. For him, adopting the name "Billy" as more than an alias is a move to grow a male identity that aligns with how he sees himself, not the one assigned to him at birth. The name "Teena" is clearly feminine and ties him to a gender identity that does not align with his own. By choosing "Billy," a common and clearly masculine name, he is attempting to create a persona that society will perceive as male, which is especially important for someone living as a transgender man in a society that often demands rigid gender conformity.

By disguising his name as 'Billy', Brandon was rejecting his femininity which was related to Brannon's concept of masculinity, namely No Sissy Stuff. Brandon's discomfort with his birth name reflects his rejection of the feminine identity imposed upon him. Brandon's discomfort with his birth name reflects his rejection of his feminine identity. By changing his name, Brandon symbolically distances himself from traits associated with femininity, reinforcing his desire to be recognized, respected, and treated as a man. The interaction also highlights how transgender individuals often feel the need to be seen as their authentic selves, even if it means adopting a new identity in everyday situations. Through this moment, we can see how closely name, identity, and gender performance are intertwined in Brandon's journey, making his introduction as "Billy" both a form of resistance and self-affirmation.



Picture 3. 7 The first time he used the name Brandon (07:45)



Picture 3. 8 Brandon have a fight with strangers (08:30)

The No Sissy Stuff of how Brandon constructs his male identity by changing his name can also be seen in this picture 3. 7. After Brandon is kicked out by his nephew, Lonny, for making a lot of trouble regarding his habit of dating women, Brandon goes to a bar to calm himself down. At the bar, he gets acquainted with a woman named Candance. Brandon, whose real name is Teena Ray Brandon introduces himself by saying, "I'm Brandon" which is also his nickname during the whole film. According to Butler's theory of gender performativity, identity is not something one has, but rather something one does, produced and maintained through repeated linguistic actions and expressions. By changing his name to "Brandon" and consistently performing this identity throughout the film, he reinforces his masculine subjectivity through language and behavior.

When Brandon was leaving Candace, there is someone who tries to get close to Candace, and makes her uncomfortable. Bars tend to be laid-back, open, and full of strangers, so they're considered a "safe" place to try out acquaintances or flirt without any major commitment. In situations like this, guys often feel like they have a "chance" to approach girls they find attractive. Because he didn't like seeing his acquaintance treated so boldly, he immediately reprimanded the person who made Candace uncomfortable.

The picture 3. 8 shows Brandon fighting with a man in a bar. He punched the man fearlessly like a man. Even though he was defeated, Brandon still wanted to continue hitting him, but the action was

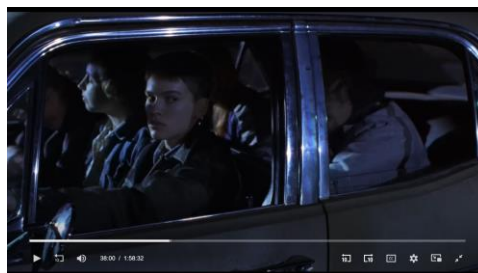
thwarted by other people. In the film, Brandon is also depicted as a brave and fearless character. He does not hesitate to defend himself or others who are important to him if it bothers him.

Brandon's fearless action of hitting a stranger to protect his female friend is included in Brannon's concept of masculinity called Give 'Em Hell. The point of this concept is the belief that masculinity is demonstrated through assertiveness, confrontation, and a willingness to face danger or conflict head-on which is suited to Brandon's courageous action. The Sturdy Oak concept also includes in this scene when Brandon has been hit and falls but Brandon does not complain and instead continues to hit. This proves his masculinity which puts aside emotional feelings to hide the weak side.

Brandon, who had nowhere to go after being kicked out by Lonny, joined Candace and his other friends. Brandon is invited to a remote town, not even on the map, called Falls City, Nebraska. It is where he meets ex-convicts John Lotter and Tom Nissen and also their friends Candace and Lana Tisdell. In a fairly harsh life there, Brandon tries to adjust, one of which is with the bumper sky game played by a man there. Bumper sky is a kind of rodeo game that uses a Pick up truck by standing on the end of the tub while holding a rope and being carried at high speed and turning right and left in an uncertain direction. John tells him to try again after Brandon falls many times without thinking about Brandon's condition. Because of John's pushy personality, John would not let Brandon give up easily Lana, who cares about Brandon, tells John to stop him for telling Brandon to try the game again after falling for many times. Because Brandon didn't want to look like a coward, he tried the game even though he kept falling off the car.

Men are expected to be physically and emotionally strong, able to face pain and hardship without complaining. With Brandon being able to hide the pain as he falls over and over again without any complaints, it fits in with Brannon and David's concept of The Sturdy Oak. For Brandon, who has navigated the complexities of gender identity in a hostile environment, conforming to these standards has become not only a matter of self-esteem, but also a vital strategy for survival and social acceptance. His resilience has become a means of confidently performing masculinity, strengthening his identity in the eyes of others while simultaneously highlighting the expectations placed on men, especially trans men, to conform to rigid norms. Masculinity is also a configuration of gender practices that ensures a dominant position within gender. Brandon's dominant side can be seen in this scene.

In this picture 3.9, Brandon and his friends want to go for a drive together. When deciding who will drive, John chooses him. Because John is pushy and thinks everything has to be his way, Brandon has no choice but to obey him. But because of this coercion, Brandon's masculinity became more and more formed. By he choosing Brandon to drive, he is recognizing Brandon's prowess and strength as a validation of his masculinity. Thus, while John's coercion is rooted in dominance, it simultaneously serves to shape and affirm Brandon's gender performance.



Picture 3. 9 Brandon driving a car (38:00)

According to Butler's theory of gender performativity, identity is formed through repeated actions that conform to social expectations; thus, Brandon's compliance and the group's recognition of him as "one of the guys" further reinforces his masculine identity. The act of driving becomes a symbol of Brandon's acceptance into the male social sphere, reinforcing his identity through the trust and expectations placed upon him in a masculine role. According to Brannon and David's masculinity theory,

forms of recognition such as athletic prowess or a reputation for sexual performance align with the concept of Be a Big Wheel. This model has influenced everything from workplace dynamics to media portrayals of men as strong leaders, athletes, and breadwinners (Shumway, 2022). It also reinforces the idea that a man's worth is tied to his accomplishments and the respect he earns. By driving the car, Brandon looks more masculine like a man in a social norm that tends to dominate.

Sexual Performativity

Sexual identity according to Judith Butler (1999) refers to the idea that sexual identities, desires, and behaviors are not innate or fixed, but are constructed and expressed through repeated social acts, language, and interactions just as gender is. It challenges the idea that sexuality is a natural or essential aspect of a person, arguing that sexuality is produced and reproduced through performative acts that are shaped by cultural and societal expectations.

Brandon's Desire to Man

Brandon's desire for men is seen from the way Brandon interacts with men, where Brandon tends not to show any romantic interest.



Picture 3. 10 John hold Brandon's hands (9:49)



Picture 3. 11 Playfulness interaction with John (34:03)

Picture 3. 10 shows a moment after Brandon joins John's group. While lighting John's cigarette, John grabs Brandon's hand and comments on its small size, creating brief tension. Normally, such a gesture might suggest flirtation if Brandon presented as a woman. However, Brandon does not respond with any of these signs. Instead, he maintains a neutral and calm demeanor, dismissing the touch and comment as completely unimportant. Brandon's nonchalant reaction is significant because he is not romantically or sexually attracted to men

They live in a harsh and informal environment, where they communicate and make friends using rough methods. At the beginning of the film, John is depicted as a friendly person who likes rough jokes when interacting with other people, especially between a man. Therefore, in based on the picture 3. 11, it show an interactions with John, Brandon behaves like any other male when interacting with John's male friend, who is depicted as a rugged masculine figure, expressing friendship in an aggressive manner at one point by jokingly hitting him on the head. Even so, it is considered normal and even a common way to communicate. Rather than reacting with offense or discomfort, he laughs in response, accepting the act as harmless male bonding.

If Brandon is identified as a heterosexual woman, such an interaction of physical playfulness might be interpreted as rude, disrespectful, or even inappropriate, highlighting the double standards of gender behavior. However, because he does not view men as members of the opposite sex or as potential romantic partners, he interprets John's crude jokes as normal male behavior among friends, rather than as an annoyance or threat. His ability to navigate this interaction without hesitation demonstrates how attuned he is to masculine performance codes, and it further emphasizes the performative aspects of gender as theorized by Judith Butler. Brandon's casual response and adaptation to John's behavior

reflect not only his internal sense of being male, but also the external effort required to be accepted as a man in a world that often strictly regulates gender roles and behaviors.



Picture 3. 12 Tom and Brandon lay on the ground (46:40)

In the picture 3. 12, a quiet yet meaningful scene in the film, they have closeness to each other. Brandon and Tom are shown lying together beside a campfire under the night sky, sharing a quiet, relaxed moment, devoid of romantic or sexual tension. The firelight casts a warm glow between them. Yet the interaction between them is entirely casual, resembling the easy interaction often seen between close male friends. There is no discomfort or hesitation evident from Brandon, no hint of nervousness or vulnerability that would normally arise if a heterosexual woman were alone in the same setting as a man, especially at night and in such an isolated environment. Brandon's comfort in this scenario reflects his internal gender identity and orientation. Because he identifies as male and has no romantic or sexual interest in men, he views the situation through the lens of friendship rather than sexual attraction. His ease in lying next to Tom underscores the sincerity of his male identity, not as a performance, but as a deeply rooted part of who he is.

Brandon's Desire to Woman

Brandon's interest in women is different from men. While he interacts with a man, he does not give any sense of interest in a romantic way. Meanwhile, when he is interacting with a woman, he feels they are his love interest. Brandon clearly displays his sexual performativity so that he can form sexuality.



Picture 3. 13 Brandon kissed Nichole (04:27)



Picture 3. 14 Brandon collects photos of women (06:31)

In the picture 3. 14, Brandon's behavior, who often caused problems related to the women he was dating, is not liked by Lonny so then he kicked Brandon from his house. It is also because Brandon made a mess of his house. People who have problems with Brandon, banging loudly on Lonny's door and screaming while throwing rocks at his house window. After that, Lonny forcibly snatched the money that Lonny gave to Brandon in his wallet. Lonny's inability to regulate his emotions is the cause of this behavior. Although he was sincere in his support of Brandon's gender identity before, his inability to handle the increased pressure caused a violent reaction that showed his emotional deficiencies and instability. He acted out of a lack of emotional control caused by fear, disappointment, and the burden of being torn between opposing forces, not out of hatred. When Brandon's wallet was forcibly snatched, it fell and showed several photos of different women. With this, his habit of having relationships with women was revealed.

Butler's gender performativity theory says that sexual identity is not a core, unchanging aspect of the self, but emerges from the ongoing performance of actions, roles, and desires influenced by society. This view emphasizes the power of social norms and repetitive behaviors in shaping how individuals understand and express their sexual identities, while also allowing for the possibility of change and resistance to normative categories. With Brandon dating women frequently, it can shape his sexual identity. Due to the problems Brandon caused, his relationship with Lonny began to strain. Brandon sought escape to calm himself, one of which was going to a bar. Because of this, Brandon met new friends, Tom, John, and Candance, who made him feel comfortable and joined their circle.

After chatting with John and Tom in the billiard hall that night, Brandon noticed a drunk female in the bar's corner. She turned out to be Lana Tisdell a friend of Candace, John, and Tom. When Lana and her friends were ready to start singing at the bar, they passed in front of Brandon. Brandon was amazed by Lana's beauty and appeared to fall in love with her right away. There Brandon is seen continuing to pay attention to one of the women and smiles when he sees her. Based on the examination of nonverbal cues, it can be inferred that Brandon, who is actually a woman, has same-sex sexual interests. The fact that Brandon was shocked and in admiration of Lana's attractiveness when she passed in front of him is evidence that he is a lesbian, or homosexual. According to Brandon's expression, he looked at Lana constantly. It was as if he had finally found the woman he had been searching for. Butler asserts that there is no gender or sexual identity prior to the acts that express it. Identities are continually being formed through these acts, meaning that who we are in terms of gender and sexuality is a product of what we do in terms of our behavior, mannerisms, dress, speech, and interactions.



Picture 3. 15 Brandon kissed Lana (49:20)



Picture 3. 16 Brandon makes love with Lana in his true biological sex (1:42:03)

Based on the picture 3. 15, in the morning, Brandon, who was staying at Candace's house, intended to depart Falls City and head back to Lincoln. In his farewell letter, Brandon thanked Candace for allowing him to remain at her place. While Brandon was writing a letter, Lana came to Brandon's residence. They both continued to sit on the sofa. As they were chatting on the sofa, they slowly began to realize their feelings for each other. Not long after, Brandon suddenly kissed Lana on the lips.

The idea that sexual identity is innate or solely biological is challenged by gender performativity theory, which emphasizes that identity is created through repeated behaviors, cultural expectations, and ongoing social interactions. Judith Butler argues that gender and sexuality are social performances that gain significance through repetition and recognition within a regulatory framework, rather than as fixed characteristics originating within the individual. In this situation, a person's identity is shaped by the ongoing performance and embodiment of socially acceptable roles. In *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), Brandon's experiences serve as a powerful example of this concept. His ongoing romantic and emotional relationships with women are consistent with societal expectations for male behavior and demonstrate a heteronormative masculine identity. Thus, Brandon's sexual identity is not simply a matter of internal feelings, but a social construction that develops through his interactions and performances within a heteronormative environment.

Because Brandon was in a transphobic and homophobic environment, After Brandon's biological sex was revealed, his friends felt disappointed with Brandon, but, not with Lana. In the picture 3. 16, after Lana learns that Brandon's biological sex is female, her choice to continue their sexual relationship becomes a key moment for understanding gender performativity. Judith Butler's idea of performativity suggests that gender is not a fixed essence; it is built through repeated actions, gestures, and performances that match social expectations.

In this situation, Lana's acceptance supports Brandon's masculine performance while allowing him to express his sexuality beyond strict biological categories. Brandon's sexual identity grows through this close interaction, as he can engage in sexual activity without his gender performance being questioned. Instead of reducing him to his biological sex, Lana's response shows how identity can exist in the mix of biological, social, and performative factors. This moment highlights that gender and sexuality are flexible and shaped by society, and recognizing others is important for legitimizing and maintaining one's performative identity.

In conclusion, gender identity is fluid and shaped through performativity. In the film, Brandon builds a masculine identity through his hairstyle, clothing, and behavior, supported by Lonny and reinforced by his rough social environment. Using Brannon and David's masculinity theory, Brandon's actions align with masculine traits, while Butler's theory explains how his gender and sexual identity are constructed. Though he shows no interest in men, Brandon prefers women, and his masculine performance helps him gain acceptance in a homophobic environment.

CONCLUSION

Boys Don't Cry (1999) shows how gender identity is expressed through performance, seen in Brandon Teena's constant effort to live as a man despite challenges from his body and social environment. His masculine clothing, behavior, and interactions reflect his male gender identity and fit Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, where repeated actions shape gender. Brandon's actions, appearance, and interactions throughout the film depict a complex yet consistent performance of masculinity shaped by personal identity and societal expectations. His choice to wear masculine clothing and emulate various aspects of men reflects his male gender identity and aligns with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which emphasizes how repetitive behaviors, such as clothing styles, shape gender.

Brandon's gender performativity is also supported by Brannon and David's masculinity theory. Brandon's rejection of feminine clothing is in line with Brannon's and David's "No Sissy Stuff" rule, underscoring his refusal to conform to norms associated with his biological gender. Brandon's confrontation with the men who make Candace uncomfortable illustrates Brannon's "Give 'Em Hell" concept of being assertive, brave, and willing to face danger. Even after being beaten, Brandon's continued aggression, without showing vulnerability, aligns with the "Sturdy Oak" ideals of fortitude and emotional control. Similarly, when John chooses Brandon to drive, it reinforces Brannon and David's "Be the Big Wheel" concept, highlighting Brandon's social recognition of masculinity through leadership and perceived competence.

Brandon's masculinity is reinforced by support from Lonny, who cuts his hair and helps refine his appearance. Brandon's environment also influences his masculinity. While surrounded by Tom, John, and his friends, their interactions are often rough, especially those between men. This strengthens Brandon's masculinity as he adapts to the men in his environment. With women, Brandon shows romantic interest, but with men, he does not. His efforts to look and act like a man are ways to gain acceptance in a homophobic setting. Overall, Brandon's character shows how masculinity is built and maintained through performance shaped by culture and the expectations of others.

Future research on gender performativity could look into how camera angles, lighting, music, and character interactions shape and reinforce gender identities. Close-ups, lighting, and speech influence audience perceptions of gender conformance or opposition. Comparing different characters or genres may also illustrate how context shapes depictions of masculinity, femininity, and transgender identities. Such an examination would help us better understand how cinema reflects and influences cultural conceptions of gender.

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