

# Children's Socialization to Gender Identity: A Study of Laurie Frankel's *This Is How It Always Is*

Norah Hasan Alqahtani  
King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia

**Abstract**—The actions and behaviors exhibited by parents play a significant role in shaping the development of gender identity in their children. Several previous studies about gender identity formation in the family context have been published (Bandura & Bussey, 1999; Berenbaum et al., 2006; Boe & Woods, 2018; Friedman et al., 2007; Huston, 1983; Leaper, 2002; Martin & Ruble, 1998; McHale et al., 2003). However, though this study maintains this emphasis, it also broadens it in significant ways using an ecological perspective that focuses on the interaction between individual characteristics and ecological surroundings (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Moreover, this topic's application to literary works appears to be uncommon. There have yet to be any comprehensive investigations into the same subject. The objective of the current study is to examine the impact of parental influence and its consequences on the development of gender identity in a fictional child protagonist named Claude as depicted in Laurie Frankel's literary work titled *This Is How It Always Is*. The present investigation involves the analysis of data obtained from the novel to examine the topics of family socialization influences and its consequences of societal exclusion and marginalization through the lens of a sociocultural perspective in psychology. The analytical frameworks employed in this study are the Cognitive-developmental theory developed by Martin et al. (2002), and the Gender schema theory proposed by Bem (1981). Additionally, the study examines Claude's social failure to fit.

**Index Terms**—transgenderism, gender identity, family socialization, societal exclusion, *This Is How It Always Is*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The number of children encountering gender identity issues such as transgenderism is likely to have increased in recent years (Kirkup et al., 2020). The concern brings the question of how gender identity is fragile in early childhood. Even though biological sex is fixed at birth, Martin et al. (2002) and Bem (1981) found that the formation of gender identity is a continuous process with no linear relationship to biological assignment. They go on to describe how gender conceptions are constructed from a complex mix of experiences and how they interact with encouraging and self-regulating processes to govern gender-related behavior throughout the life course.

Hence, the evolution of gender identity cannot be viewed through one particular lens. Diverse perspectives exist on the development itself. It encompasses biological, psychological, sociological and cultural aspects (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, Vygotsky (1978) maintained that children learn from their parents, family members, caregivers, and peers and that the culture around them plays a crucial role in the development of their cognitive abilities. He also considered that each culture influences development differently. That is to say, a variety of social influencing factors, including parents, peers, the media, and other social systems play a role in the formation of gender perceptions and the associated self-regulatory processes. Furthermore, the formation of gender identity can be influenced by a variety of social factors, including the involvement of parents.

Even in the production of works of fiction, the gender identity question has come to dominate society's perspective. In the 2017 novel *This Is How It Always Is* by Laurie Frankel, the author drew inspiration for her novel from her own experience bringing up a transgender child. Western culture faces the issue of comprehending transgenderism and the first generation of visibly transgender children at present. It is a reality-based story about a child named Claude who decides to be a girl at a young age. Apart from the difficulty of living his early life as a gender-nonconforming child, this narrative additionally demonstrates the development of this child's gender identity as he grows older. Still, it develops from the interaction of social and personal factors. That is, the question of gender identity in the narrative suggests the existence of social impact in the context of family and friends, as the novel focuses primarily on how parents handle a child who does not conform to gender norms. Moreover, the author writes this controversial novel as an act of imagination and an exercise in wish fulfillment to make the world a better and welcoming place for her trans child and all other children. That is why the narrative interweaves two stories; the fairy tale of Grumwald is told to interweave the complicated tale of Claude with a happy ending.

This study combines psychological and sociocultural determinants into a single conceptual framework. It applies the cognitive-developmental theory developed by Martin et al. (2002) and the Gender schema theory proposed by Bem (1981) to illustrate the relationship between parental role and children's gender identity development. Each of these

theories incorporates cognitive processes, albeit not necessarily in identical ways. Cognitive-developmental theory emphasizes the significance of cognitive processes concerning gender constancy formation. Gender schema theory particularly emphasizes how the formation of schemas shapes both the meaning and comprehension of gender-relevant knowledge. In both theories social factors, and especially parents, play a crucial part in the early stages of cognitive processes and socialization related to gender identity development.

As a result of people's behaviors, gender roles are evolving which alter the social subsystems and impact the formation of gender identity. Parents serve as the primary source of social learning; consequently, family is one of the major contexts of gender development in early childhood. In accordance with the above theories, parents influence gendered conduct and norms through their behaviors, professions, endorsement or rejection of their children's activities. In other words, parents can indirectly transmit gender messages to their children through their behaviors and, even more so, directly through parental informal education (McHale et al., 2003).

According to cognitive-developmental theory, the awareness of gender is the result of having passed through three phases of cognitive maturation that are relevant specifically to gender. Martin et al. (2002) defined them as follows: (1) gender identity, or a child's developing awareness that they belong to either the male or the female category, (2) gender rigidity, or recognizing the rigid categories of male and female, with distinct traits and behaviors related to each one, and this gender identity does not undergo any alterations as time progresses. This process is referred to as gender constancy; it is the gradual recognition that gender is unchangeable, and it is an integral part of the cognitive-developmental approach. The argument posits that following the attainment of gender constancy by a child, gender categories assume greater relevance (Martin et al., 2002).

Martin et al. (2002) state that the theory highlights the significance of mastery or competence motivation in the development of gender, as children strive to align their perceptions and behaviors with their evolving understanding of gender categories. In other words, children are aware of the significance of the gender binary which compels them to conform to their designated category. Overall, cognitive-developmental theory concentrates on how children socialize once they realize they belong to either the male or female category (Bem, 1981). In this theory, gender cognition, therefore, takes priority. Martin et al. (2002) found that gender constancy is central to children's comprehension of various aspects of gender including awareness of same-sex modeling, selective attention and gender stereotypes.

In the Gender Schema theory, the process in which schemas are engaged enables a relationship between the child's beliefs and conduct, and in turn, defines the development of their gender and self-attitudes. The hypothesis is that gender-based schematic processing is the mechanism by which children become sex-typed (i.e., manifest specific characteristics and beliefs regarded as suitable for one sex but not the other). This occurs as a result of the self-concept integration into the gender schema (cognitive categorization of gender-related information pertinent to the self, such as attitudes, lifestyles, and behavior) as a result of learning from society which qualities they should and should not possess given their sex. According to Bem's (1981) argument, the process of self-evaluation is linked to gender schemas, as children acquire the ability to assess their preferences, attitudes, behaviors, and personal traits concerning their gender schema.

Concerning the rationale of the study, several previous studies about gender identity formation in the family context have been published (Bandura & Bussey, 1999; Berenbaum et al., 2006; Boe & Woods, 2018; Friedman et al., 2007; Huston, 1983; Leaper, 2002; Martin & Ruble, 1998; McHale et al., 2003). This study maintains this emphasis of those studies but broadens it in significant ways using an ecological perspective that focuses on the interaction between individual characteristics and ecological surroundings (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Moreover, this topic's application to literary works appears to be uncommon. There are no comprehensive investigations into the same subject yet. This study aims to examine this novel academically by concentrating on the topic of the formation of gender identities and employing cognitive-developmental theory. As the character's gender identity is viewed as both a personal and a social issue, familial influence is deemed essential when attempting to examine the formation of the character's feminine identity within a male body.

## II. METHODS

This study intends to demonstrate the familial, and especially the parents', influence on the main child character Claude's gender identity formation in Laurie Frankel's novel *This Is How It Always Is* (2017). This study aims to analyze the data from *This Is How It Always Is* by concentrating on the question of gender identity formation. The study employs a literary criticism that uses an ecological perspective such as a sociocultural perspective in psychology, that is, the sociocultural approach employed by psychologists to study the influence of the individual's family, peers, environment, and religious beliefs on their behaviors and thoughts. In this study, this approach will be implemented to provide careful consideration to the protagonist's gender identity development, his learning process and his social integration.

Early social learning theories (Mischel, 1966) emphasized how parents shape their children's behavior through displays of affection, encouragement, and control in the context of ordinary interactions. In addition to those theories, the cognitive-developmental theory developed by Martin et al. (2002) and the Gender schema theory proposed by Bem (1981) are used to examine main character Claude's gender identity formation. The fundamental premise of these theories is that individuals acquire cognitive and behavioral skills by observing the behavior of others. This study

emphasizes the role of parents as one of the social influence agents in those theories along with their evaluative reactions as crucial factors. Then, it will examine the impact upon the transgender child protagonist and how he is trapped in a vicious cycle of societal exclusion and marginalization. This study aims to investigate the social conduct towards individuals who identify as transgender and the factors that contribute to their marginalization from society. As a result, the following questions are pertinent when evaluating the influence of parents and society on children's gender development:

1. Do gender-related differences in parental expectations and behavior influence the gender development of their child?
2. Is there a correlation between social isolation and loneliness experienced by transgender children and adolescents, and the severity of their depression and suicidal ideation?

### III. DISCUSSION

Family is the most fundamental unit of human social organization, and compared to other groups of people, it is the oldest community entity. Family socialization is the process through which an individual acquires the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively operate within their cultural context. Children receive their first and primary education (informal education) from their families. When a child becomes a member of the family, the informal education that occurs within the family is always an ongoing activity. Consequently, there is a saying that families, particularly parents, are the primary educators. The morality, personality, spiritual, cognitive abilities, attitudes, and other aspects of a child's character begin to form through parental guidance. So, the family plays a role in molding the personality and traits of their children. Preparing children to become healthy individuals is facilitated by loving parental care and instruction about the values of life, both religious and socio-cultural. Moreover, the role of parents in establishing societal values and norms is crucial, particularly in matters of gender identity.

The function of the family, particularly parents as role models for their children, can influence the development of children's attitudes, particularly in terms of gender identity recognition. Therefore, the significance of the family's role in introducing gender identity to children is a prerequisite for children to be able to recognize gender identity appropriately so that they can develop and maximize their potential in the future. The concepts of gender and sex are distinct, with sex being a biological designation for males and females, whereas gender pertains more to social and cultural constructs (McDermott & Hatemi, 2011). Gender is not about men and women. Rather, it refers to the socially constructed roles and distinctions in social functions between men and women that are shaped by their social environment, and families are the first to provide their children with societal norms that support the development of a gender identity based on the child's sex.

In Frankel's novel *This Is How It Always Is* (2017), Rosie and Penn, the parents of the young protagonist Claude, are the prime agents in Claude's gender socialization (Boe & Woods, 2018). At a young age, parental gender socialization influences children and shapes their identities. Parental expectations, toys, bedtime stories, and interaction with their children are the first opportunities to send gender-based messages by encouraging their children to engage in activities related to a particular gender. However, it is important to know that with four sons, Rosie and Penn badly want a baby girl. They take all the chances "[T]rying for a girl" by avoiding red meat and putting a wooden spoon under the bed (Frankel, p. 4). The room was painted yellow in case the baby was a girl. Rosie was thinking in the hospital if the newborn were female, which was highly anticipated, "she would name her Poppy" (p. 9). Rosie and Penn had the name chosen from the first pregnancy, though Rosie had had it in mind for even longer after the death of her little sister whose name was Poppy. "At that very moment, Rosalinda Walsh, aged twelve, decided two things: her daughter would have long hair, like really long, like long enough to sit on, and she would name her Poppy" (p. 10). Rosie longs for a baby girl named after her late sister to fulfill a childhood wish. However, Rosie is not alone in this dream. Penn has also always dreamed of having a daughter named Poppy (p. 15). Nevertheless, Rosie gives birth to a baby boy named Claude.

Since Rosie and Penn gave birth to the boy, however, that does not deter them from raising him as a girl. From an early age, they encourage Claude's girly behaviors as an assertion of love. Indeed, Claude was only three when he told his parents that he wanted to be a girl and wear a dress. His mother only encouraged him further: "[Y]ou can be anything you want when you grow up, baby. Anything at all" (p. 32). Over time, Claude's parents notice how persistent and consistent Claude is in his wanting to be a girl. They allow him to wear a dress to school and his mother's nightshirt, lavender with lace around the collar, to bed (pp. 37, 38). Even the bedtime story of Prince Grumwald that his father tells him is feminized (p. 29). Moreover, Claude's grandmother, Carmy, lets him try her dresses, jewelry and shoes as if she is "mentally subbing one Poppy for another, her granddaughter now at ten, the age of the Poppy she lost" (p. 198). When asked by Claude regarding her enduring affection for him despite his persistent inclination to don a dress, she affirms her love for him. Claude takes her answer as approval to go further and chooses a pink bikini as a preschool graduation present (p. 44). At the same time, Rosie and Penn believe that "[Claude is] not failing to conform—there's nothing to conform to. He's not subverting sex-based expectations because we don't have any sex-based expectations" (p. 73). In this context, parental beliefs may have a long-term effect on the gender development of their child (McHale et al., 2003), and the parents disregard conventional gender behavior and expectations constructed by the surrounding culture as suggested by Parmley and Cunningham (2008).

Given their gender, girls and boys become socialized in different ways in terms of feelings that they are advised are suitable to express. Research suggests that when a female child expresses distress through crying, there is a higher probability of receiving supportive attention contrasted to a male child who cries (Parmley & Cunningham, 2008). Thus, girls and boys develop socialization differently regarding the expression of emotions per what is most suitable for their respective sexes. Females are predicted to display feminine and soft sentiments such as crying, whereas males are predicted to have manly and tough emotional expressions such as suppressing tears. Therefore, affections are both sexually categorized and stereotyped.

At the age of five, Claude started to encounter the real world outside of home. He felt weird and precarious as revealed in the excerpts below:

‘You know,’ Penn said carefully, so carefully, ‘you could wear a dress or a shirt to school if you wanted. It would be okay.’

‘No it wouldn’t,’ said Claude... ‘the other kids would make fun of me.’ Claude’s eyes were full too. (p. 57)

Instead of looking up to the norms of heteronormativity, Rosie and Penn prefer to be tolerant of other-gendered orientations and non-binary identities.

Because gendered orientation-emotion stereotypes are a type of schema, some researchers are curious about the context in which children may employ them. According to Shields (1995), the utilization of stereotypes is contingent upon the context. Additionally, Robinson et al. (1998) found that stereotypes are more likely to be activated in equivocal circumstances (as cited in Pamley & Cunningham, 2008). Thus, Parmley and Cunningham (2008) investigated whether young children use gender-emotion stereotypes when questioned about a character’s emotional experience in an emotionally ambiguous setting (p. 360). In fact, they discovered that, even when the context was ambiguous for both male and female characters, children were more likely to perceive the male character as enraged and the female character as sorrowful.

These findings suggest that children’s cognitions related to emotions and feelings are stereotyped and that these stereotypes are more likely to be employed in ambiguous situations. This supports the gender schema theory, as the same information was assigned various meanings based on the gender of the character. Nevertheless, the social aspect of cognition cannot be neglected. How parents discuss emotions with their children facilitates socialization (Parmley & Cunningham, 2008). Therefore, according to these researchers, the relationship between emotional and social development may be “inseparable” (p. 359). It demonstrates how Rosie and Penn as parents fail to use gender-emotion stereotypes and socialize their child’s identity toward a feminine one.

Penn imparted this perspective to his children, including Claude, through a bedtime story he told each night. Penn is a true raconteur of magical fiction that is not only intended to amuse but also to impart information and meaning about Claude’s problem. As shown in the excerpt below, he frequently uses a fictional character to represent Claude:

She [Princess Stephanie] felt bad about lying to them, but she did not want to risk losing them by telling the truth, which was easy. If she wore a T-shirt when they went swimming, if she always changed in the bathroom, they never saw her without a top on so her wings were hidden. (p. 183)

The story of Grumwald or Princess Stephanie, who disguises herself as a night fairy, represents Claude, who disguises himself as a girl. Penn equates the meaning of “a boy who becomes a girl” to that of “a fairy who can fly and light the stars”; she is something enchanting, beautiful, and extraordinary that her ordinary peers cannot comprehend. This fairy tale by Penn reveals what he thinks of Claude’s gender identity development, namely that his desire to be a female has value and that being a girl is in no way embarrassing. Weinraub et al. (1984) found that young children of fathers with more traditional views of gender were more conscious about gender stereotypes and gender identity. Turner and Gervai (1995) revealed comparable findings, stating that children developed less gender-typed schemas in non-traditional contexts. In the novel, the conventional image of the father as the main breadwinner and the mother as a domestic worker is no longer the norm let alone their sex-based expectations.

Parents’ gender schemas are significant because they underlay mothers’ and fathers’ conduct as examples, the counsel and instruction they provide to their children regarding gender, and parents’ gendered reactions to and redirection of their children’s behavior, and interests. In the narrative, Rosie, Penn and the grandmother who “bought Claude a new tea-length dress because he’d outgrown the other one,” send negative messages to Claude that make him fail to fit into prescribed gender norms (p. 82). As a result, Rosie incorrectly interprets her own assertion that she and Penn do not influence Claude’s development of gender identity:

‘You, um ... turned your son into a girl?’ Frank finally managed. ‘Not turned him into.’ As with so many disasters, it seemed the only way forward was deeper. “More like accepted who he—she—already was. (p. 128)

The data indicates that Rosie presumptively accepts her son for who he already is based on her evaluation. However, when Claude is three years old and wears a pink bikini, it is improbable that he already identifies as a female confined in a male body. In fact, this parenting style led to Claude’s gender identity crisis. Rosie and Penn’s permission, consent, rewards, and other positive implications not only convey information about the potential outcomes of Claude’s behaviors but also serve as incentives to adopt particular courses of conduct. As Claude experiences gender, he comprehends it by assimilating his parents’ reactions into his gender schema and what roles should be assigned to him as emphasized by Bem (1981) and McHale et al. (2003). When Claude is taught that dressing and acting like a girl is an acceptable behavior and not a problem, he develops gender schemas that influence his self-regulation process.

Research suggests that boys tend to receive greater punishment than girls for non-conformity to gendered behavior leading to a higher likelihood of boys monitoring their gendered behavior compared to girls (Martin et al., 2002). In contrast, Claude does not receive any punishment for deviating from his gender norms, leading to a reduced level of self-regulation. He disregards personal standards that value gender-relatedness, and he is not required to behave like others of his gender. Accordingly, once the family moves to Seattle, they hide the truth from their neighbors; instead, they present Claude as “Poppy” their daughter. They put themselves and their child in an endless dilemma once Claude socializes with female friends and is introduced to them as Poppy. However, the parents miss an important fact that they are not raising this child in isolation. They overlook cultural expectations and societal prescribed gender norms, and that is the real-world society that their trans child has to encounter.

Furthermore, gender is a fundamental aspect of society. The structure is organized based on the classification of biological sex into the gendered dichotomies of male and female (Gannon, 2014). Around the world, gender-diverse and transgender individuals face high levels of violence and discrimination. Anti-gay bigotry has been practiced throughout history. Discrimination, prejudice, and violence have taken various forms from the Nazi extermination of homosexuals to the implementation of sodomy laws punishable by detention, castration, persecution and execution (Adam, 1987). Stigmatization in society entails a higher risk of psychopathology development. Mueller et al. (2018) assert that transgender people are particularly vulnerable to stigmatization and social rejection. The findings have implications for understanding the role of social exclusion in the development of mental health issues among socially marginalized individuals (Mueller et al., 2018). Moreover, they are trapped in a downward spiral of marginalization and exclusion and are frequently bullied at school, rejected by family, forced out onto the streets, and denied employment opportunities. In fact, a growing corpus of social science research indicates that gender-affirming behavior on the part of parents and other adults (teachers, grandparents, etc.) significantly enhances psychological health and well-being. The opposite is also correct, transgender children are more likely to experience anxiety and melancholy and are at a higher risk for abuse.

In America, transgender people encounter discrimination and bigotry and are most susceptible to physical and sexual violence (Stotzer, 2009). Transgender people are similarly socially marginalized and expelled in Europe (Takács, 2006). According to Takács, transgender (LGBT) individuals in Europe face prejudice and exclusion every day. They experience detachment from family, bullying, and rejection at school which can contribute to a multitude of problems such as poor academic performance, school dropout, a lack of self-worth, and mental illness. These factors negatively impact the ability of young LGBT individuals to manage the transition from school to employment and to become self-reliant, contributing adults in society. China, a major nation with the world's largest population, excludes transgender people and denies them many social and legal rights (Mountford, 2010).

The data in the narrative validates the argument above. Claude's first encounter with a hostile society was at the age of three. He dressed in a bikini in public and a few children covered their eyes, pointed and chuckled at him. Also, the adults raised their hands to their mouths and murmured to one another behind them (p. 47). Claude's brothers Roo and Ben show concern about the consequences and try to alert their parents, with Ben stating:

I'm worried about Claude because other kids are going to make fun of him and be mean to him and maybe try to hurt him and he doesn't care. And you and Mon don't even care. (p. 48)

'...you can't send him out in the world like that. You don't understand.' 'You're his parents,' Roo pled. 'it's your job to protect him.' 'It's weird that he wants to wear girl clothes and lip gloss and heels and jewelry. It's not normal. It's freaky'. (p. 78)

Claude's parents were aware of the intolerant society, yet they didn't help their child fit into the acceptable gender norms. A concern of social theorists has been the alienation from social structures, norms, and institutions. A study in sociology by Durkheim (1951) of deviation from norms as a cause of suicide centered on the significance of social environment, for instance. According to Durkheim, individuals require moral regulation from society in order to manage their own standards and needs. As a consequence of rejection, bullying, and other forms of victimization, transgender young people are at a significantly higher risk of suicide compared to their non-transgender peers, according to the study.

Savin-Williams and Ream (2003) found that support-group youth reported a 39% rate of suicide attempts. Moreover, individuals who attempted suicide experienced elevated levels of generic life stressors such as low self-esteem, substance abuse, and victimization, as well as gay-related stressors. These gay-related stressors were primarily associated with visible aspects of their gender identity, such as femininity, and behavioral aspects. This type of societal conduct contributes to the marginalization of transgender individuals. Individuals undergo psychological trauma and may experience suicidal thoughts.

The data collected from the narrative show the societal bigotry against transgender individuals. In Claude's visit to his friend Nicky for a play date, his life is put in jeopardy:

Nicky peeked out from behind his father's leg. 'Daddy says I'm not allowed to play with faggots, Mrs. Walsh. And I don't want to anyway.' Nick spit between his teeth. 'What you do with your kid is your own damn business, but it's disgusting, and you better keep it far away from my son. Seems to me what you're doing is child abuse, and you should go to jail.'

'Why does Poppy think you have a gun?' said Penn.

‘Cause I do.’...‘I told him we don’t play with faggots, we don’t play with girls, we don’t play with boys dressed as girls, and he was no longer welcome in our home or anywhere near my kid—not at the park, not at school, not on the playground, nowhere’. (pp. 101-102)

Along with the shooting of a transgender young man after an intimate relationship on a local college campus (p. 107), the family determines that Madison, Wisconsin is a hostile setting for Poppy and relocates to the more progressive city of Seattle. Despite this, they find it simpler to start over without revealing that Poppy or Claude is transgender. Numerous studies have indicated that, despite receiving familial support or falling under human rights laws, transgender individuals typically receive limited societal support in the face of social stigma and discrimination (Bockting et al., 2007). Kirkup et al. (2020) assert that despite the potential of human rights laws to serve as a means of addressing the prevalent levels of prejudice, bullying, and assault encountered by transgender communities, scholars have articulated a number of compelling critiques regarding these contemporary advancements. Some critics have posited that hate crime legislation may not effectively discourage acts of violence. The experience of social intolerance, discrimination, or rejection by intimate partners and loved ones can lead to a lack of social support and consequent social isolation among transgender individuals. The adverse consequences of social isolation should not be underestimated, as it heightens the probability of anxiety, depression, drug use, self-injury, sexual risk-taking, and suicidal thoughts among transgender adolescents.

Still, even in the progressive city of Seattle, Poppy faces difficulty at the school in terms of the utilization of bathroom and gym facilities:

In Gym, someone said, ‘Poppy, shouldn’t you be on the other side with the boys?’ and everyone laughed.

In Health, when they broke up for sex ed, someone raised her hand and said, ‘Ms. Norton? I don’t feel comfortable with Poppy being here,’ and everyone laughed. (p. 213)

Poppy starts to be offended by his body parts and his parents discuss using hormone blockers. His father argues that the blockers were like magic, like a child’s answer to a child’s prayer, while his mother objects (p. 207). John Phillips, the author of *Transgender on Screen* (2006), asserts that the navigating of genders will prove to be the most significant cultural challenge of our time. Practical issues such as preferred pronouns, bathroom utilization, eligibility to participate in athletics, and hormone therapy for adolescents continue to be challenging issues. After being bullied at school, Poppy stops going to school and locks himself in his room. He realizes the fact after this painful confrontation with the society:

‘We did help you.’ Ben could hear his voice rising. ‘Are you kidding? We did nothing but help you. We said okay when you switched to dresses. We said okay when you changed your name and grew your hair. We moved across the country for you. We kept your secret for you.’ ‘That’s not the help I needed.’ Claude’s hands tried to grab fistfuls of hair at his temples but came up empty. ‘I needed help being a boy. I didn’t need help being different—I am different—I needed help being the same. I needed help being like you, and no one helped me, and now my life—both my lives—are over. I can’t be Poppy and I can’t be Claude, I can’t be anyone’. (p. 224)

The aforementioned excerpt provides validation for all of the arguments. Social theorists have expressed apprehension regarding the feelings of alienation from social structures and norms. Durkheim (1951) emphasizes the importance of social environment and reveals that transgender youths are at a considerably elevated risk of suicide due to the effects of victimization such as rejection and bullying.

So, in an attempt to help her child, Rosie moves to Thailand. It is her aspiration that in a society characterized by greater levels of tolerance towards transgender individuals, Claude will be able to establish a trajectory. Historically, Thailand has been perceived as a society that exhibits social acceptance towards its homosexual and transgender individuals. The prevailing attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity present a paradoxical situation wherein the conduct is largely accepted, yet it continues to be stigmatized. Previous research suggests that Thai culture is generally accepting of the transgender population. However, family acceptance of gender nonconformity is not yet widespread, as a significant number of parents react unfavorably to this phenomenon. In *Gender and Sexualities in Modern Thailand*, author presents his argument against the notion of a "Thai Gay Paradise" in his book chapter. According to Jackson's (1999) research, the notion of widespread acceptance of homosexuality in Thailand is a misconception. Cameron (2006) noted that, in Thailand, individuals who violate social norms are often subject to indirect ostracism rather than overt confrontation, thus giving rise to the notion of a "myth of tolerance." The observation can be made that, despite the visibility of transgender individuals in Thai society, social acceptance of this group is not necessarily implied. In fact, both transgender individuals and homosexuals are subject to stigmatization within Thai society.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Gender identity and expression are fundamental to how we perceive ourselves and interact with the world. This is unquestionably true for transgender children and adolescents for whom parental assistance is crucial. Children learn what it means to be a boy or a girl from their parents, elder siblings, and others in their environment. This learning begins at an early age. Parenting is to pave children’s way in this world, protecting them and helping them to fit into society.

Laurie Frankel offers an appeal in her narrative *This Is How It Always Is* (2017). For her child and for all transgender children, Frankel wants more options and more paths through life. Yet it is still a dream. Even in the most liberal and

progressive societies, a small transgender population is still confronted with medical discrimination and ignorance, as well as enormous societal pressures to conform to socially constructed gender stereotypes. They have difficulty fitting in. They are particularly vulnerable to violence, including murder, assault, mutilation, rape, and other forms of mistreatment. In short, the wide spread transgenderism is a blow that forcibly and deliberately puts societies in cultural war that use children as cannon powder.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Adam, B. D. (1987). *The rise of a gay and lesbian movement*. Boston: Twayne.
- [2] Bandura, A., & Bussey, K. (1999). Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106(4), 676–713. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.106.4.676>.
- [3] Bem, L. S. (1981). Gender Schema Theory: A Cognitive Account of Sex Typing. *Psychological Review*, 88, 354-364.
- [4] Berenbaum, S. A., Martin, C. L., & Ruble, D. (2006). Gender development. Chapter in W. Damon, R. M. Lerner, & N. Eisenberg (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Social, emotional, and personality development* (6th ed., Vol. 3, pp. 858 – 931). New York: John Wiley.
- [5] Bockting, W., Coleman, E., & Benner, A. (2007). Stigma, mental health, and resilience among the U.S. transgender population. Paper presented at the meeting of the *First World Congress for Sexual Health*, Sydney, Australia, April.
- [6] Boe, J. L., & Woods, R. J. (2018). Parents' Influence on Infants' Gender-Typed Toy Preferences. *Sex roles*, 79(5-6), 358–373. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0858-4>.
- [7] Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In R.M. Lerner (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (5th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 993 – 1028). New York: Wiley.
- [8] Cameron, L. (2006). *Sexual health and rights: Sex workers, transgender people, and men who have sex with men: Thailand*. New York: Open Society Institute.
- [9] Durkheim, E. (1951). *Suicide: A study in sociology*. New York: Free Press.
- [10] Frankel, L. (2017). *This Is How It Always Is*. New York: Flatiron Books.
- [11] Friedman, C. K., Leaper, C., & Bigler, R. (2007). Do mothers' gender -related attitudes or comments predict young children's gender beliefs? *Parenting*, 7(4), 357–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295190701665656>.
- [12] Gannon, S. (2014). *Global Sexualities, South-East Asia*. Retrieved [May 26, 2023], from Mount Royal University SLGY\_3233\_Blackboard\_website: [https://courseware.mymru.ca/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab\\_tab\\_group\\_id=\\_2\\_1&url=%2Fwebapps%2Fblackboard%2Fexecute%2Flauncher%3Ftype%3DCourse%26id%3D\\_193600\\_1%26url%3D](https://courseware.mymru.ca/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_tab_group_id=_2_1&url=%2Fwebapps%2Fblackboard%2Fexecute%2Flauncher%3Ftype%3DCourse%26id%3D_193600_1%26url%3D)
- [13] Huston, A. C. (1983). Sex-typing. In P. Mussen (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Socialization, personality, and social development* (4th ed., Vol. 4, pp. 387 – 468). New York: Wiley.
- [14] Jackson, P. (1999). Tolerant but unaccepting: The myth of a Thai “gay paradise.” In P. A. Jackson and N. Cook (Eds.), *Gender and sexualities in modern Thailand* (pp. 226–242). Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.
- [15] Kirkup, K., Airton L., McMillan A., & DesRochers J. (2020). The aftermath of human rights protections: Gender identity, gender expression, and the socio-legal regulation of school boards. *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 35(2), 245–268. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cls.2020.7>.
- [16] Leaper, C. (2002). Parenting girls and boys. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Children and parenting* (2nd ed., Vol. 1, pp. 189 – 226). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- [17] Martin, C. L., & Ruble, D. (1998). Gender development. In W. Damon & N. Eisenberg (Eds.), *The handbook of child psychology: Social, emotional and personality development* (5th ed., Vol. 3, pp. 933 – 1016). New York: John Wiley.
- [18] Martin, C. L., Ruble, D., & Szkrybalo, J. (2002). Cognitive Theories of Early Gender Development. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128, 903-933.
- [19] McDermott, R., & Hatemi, P. K. (2011). Distinguishing Sex and Gender. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 44(1), 89–92. Retrieved [June 21, 2023], from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40984490>.
- [20] McHale, S. M., Crouter, A. C., & Whiteman, S. D. (2003). The Family Contexts of Gender Development in Childhood and Adolescence. *Social Development*, 12(1), 126–148. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9507.00225>.
- [21] Mischel, W. (1966). A social-learning view of sex differences in behavior. In E. E. Maccoby (Ed.), *The development of sex differences* (pp. 57–81). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- [22] Mountford, T. (2010). *The legal status and position of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the People's Republic of China*. International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission.
- [23] Mueller, S. C., Wierckx, K., Boccadoro, S., & T'Sjoen, G. (2018). Neural correlates of ostracism in transgender persons living according to their gender identity: a potential risk marker for psychopathology? *Psychological medicine*, 48(14), 2313–2320. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291717003828>.
- [24] Parnley, M., & Cunningham, G. J. (2008). Children's Gender-Emotion Stereotypes in the Relationship of Anger to Sadness and Fear. *Sex Roles*, 58, 358-370.
- [25] Phillips, J. (2006). *Transgender on Screen*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [26] Robinson, M. D., Johnson, J. T., & Shields, S. A. (1998). The gender heuristic and the database: Factors affecting the perception of gender related differences in the experience and display of emotions. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 20, 206-219.
- [27] Savin-Williams, R., & Ream, G. (2003). Suicide Attempts Among Sexual-Minority Male Youth. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 32:4, 509-522. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15374424JCCP3204\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15374424JCCP3204_3).
- [28] Shields, S. A. (1995). The role of emotion beliefs and values in gender development. In N. Eisenberg (Ed.) *Review of personality and social psychology* (Vol. 15) (pp. 212-232). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- [29] Stotzer, R. L. (2009). Violence against transgender people: A review of United States data. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 14(3), 170-179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2009.01.006>.
- [30] Tak ács, J. (2006). *Social exclusion of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Europe: ILGA Europe Brussels, Belgium*.

- [31] Turner, P. J., & Gervai, J. (1995). A Multidimensional Study of Gender Typing in Preschool Children and Their Parents: Personality, Attitudes, Preferences, Behavior, and Cultural Differences. *Developmental Psychology*, 31(5), 759–772. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.31.5.759>.
- [32] Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- [33] Weinraub, M., Clemens, L. P., Sockloff, A., Ethridge, T., Gracely, E., & Myers, B. (1984). The Development of Sex Role Stereotypes in the Third Year: Relationships to Gender Labeling, Gender Identity, Sex-Types Toy Preference, and Family Characteristics. *Child Development*, 55(4), 1493–1503. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1130019>.

**Norah Hasan Alqahtani** is an Assistant Professor at King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia.