

Modes of Self-Actualization in the LGBTQ Movies *The Danish Girl* and *Transamerica*

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Abstract - Every human being goes through the process of self-actualization at some point in their lives. The impulses and inspirations that a person gets throughout their life culminate in self actualization, allowing them to realise their true value and potential. Abraham Maslow, a well-known American psychologist, established the hierarchy of needs, which leads to the achievement of self-actualization via the fulfillment of priorities in one's life objectives. The present article aims at re reading the modes of self-actualization envisioned by the characters in the movies *The Danish Girl* and *Transamerica*.

Key words: Identity, LGBTQ, Maslow, Self-Actualization

Self actualization or self realization is of prime significance to the development of a person to his full potential. The process of self actualization is the result of the inner drive that a human being experiences that ultimately results in finding the real motives of one's life. The prominent neurologist Kurt Goldstein coined the term self-actualization to describe the innate drives or motives within an organism. Later it was Abraham Maslow who took the term into psychology to describe its importance in human psychology.

In the noteworthy article of 1943 entitled "A Theory of Human Motivation" Maslow envisaged the hierarchy of human needs that consisted of Psychological needs, Safety needs, Belongingness and Love needs, Esteem needs and Self-actualization. According to Maslow, when a human being is satisfied with the first four needs from Psychological need he/she will ultimately reach self actualization.

THE DANISH GIRL

Art and creativity plays a significant role in the development of one's self and promotes physical and

mental well being of a person. *The Danish Girl* portrays the life of Einar and Gerda Wegener a married couple who are professionally artists. Einar, the husband is an expert in making paintings of landscapes and his wife Gerda expertise in making portraits. They live in Copenhagen and Gerda is an upcoming artist with respect to Einar who is a much established and sought out painter. The movie based on the 2000 novel of the same title written by David Ebershoff was directed by Tom Hooper. It is based on the real life story of the Danish artist Lili Elbe, the first male to undergo surgery to become a female.

The plot begins with Gerda seeking Einar's assistance in completing the portrait of a prominent opera singer Anna Fonsmark she is currently working with. She makes him wear the stockings, the ornate sandals and also places the frock upon Einar. The moment he poses Einar feels himself enjoying his attire and feels a transformation within him. When the proposed model for the portrait reaches, she kids him calling Lili. In course of time Einar feels himself more comfortable within the role of Lili and the later goes to the ball as Lili and flirts with a man named Henrik. Later events of the plot reveal that Einar was born with ovaries which were underdeveloped and this discloses his biological origin as a female. Therefore Einar had a female self within him and it was painting or art that helped him to realize his true self. Even though fate results in a tragic end to the life of Einar's life, he dies satisfied as Lili Elbe and thus fulfills his self-actualization.

TRANSAMERICA

Transamerica is an American film written and directed by Duncan Tucker in the year 2005. Felicity Huffman plays the lead role of the character Bree Osbourne who is in her way to being a trans woman and is waiting for her vaginoplasty. She receives a call from Toby who confirms to be her son. It is to

bail out Toby who is in jail that Bree makes her journey from Los Angeles to New York City. It is this journey that proves to a therapeutic one to Bree for he experiences complete transformation within her self for the successful completion of her sex reassigning surgery.

Bree lived away from her family as they were incapable to accept the change in their son. On her return journey, Bree visits her parents and they take Toby as Stanley's (Bree's male name) son and feel blessed to get their long lost grandson. The family members are so overwhelmed that they are happy for Bree and accepts her being a trans woman. Toby mistakes his emotion for Bree and approaches (knowing the male within Bree) for being in an intimate relationship. Bree is forced to reveal that she is Toby's biological father and thus cooks up a fight between them. But in the end of the movie, Bree is more relieved and happy that her family accepted her new identity, she successfully completed her surgery and is moving on with her career and had reconciled with her son who also accepts the transformation within her.

COMPARATIVE STUDY

Both Einar and Stanley experience a transformation from male to female. *The Danish Girl* portrays how Einar makes a realization on his sexual orientation and his later journey to being the first person to undergo the sex reassignment surgery. The work mainly focuses on how the art of painting plays a very significant role in Einar's life to identify his true self. Later the huge recognition that the female portrait of Einar as Lili receives makes Einar to take crucial decisions in his life. Though initially he receives much controversy from his wife later she accepts and be on his side till his death as Lili. *Transamerica* begins with Bree awaiting her final surgery, vaginoplasty and she is asked by her doctor to reconcile with her family who is against her being a trans woman and gain their acceptance. The moment of realization of her sexual orientation is never revealed in it. The movie focuses on how the journey from Los Angeles to New York proves to be therapeutic to her to reconcile with her family, accept her son and overcome her inhibitions in recognizing as a trans woman and thereby lead a life of content.

CONCLUSION

Art and journey are considered to be therapeutic. Art is often used as a method to treat psychological issues. In *The Danish Girl*, the art of painting triggers the unconscious self within Einar and become a catalyst in reaching his self actualization. The appreciations he receives for his female version makes him more authentic. Einar walks to the life as Lili with high self esteem breaking all inhibitions within him.

Journey has obvious relationships with making transformations in human character and psyche. It opens new perspectives within us and helps to overcome narrow minded outlooks in life. Journey is directed to reaching destinations. Likewise it also helps one in working in a persistent manner to reach one's goal. It is need that makes people act. In *Transamerica* Bree is insisted by the doctor to accomplish her familial bonds before the surgery and thus she embarks on the journey. This motivation fulfills the need and results in her self actualization. Her journey from Los Angeles to New York City alludes to her actual transformation into a trans woman; from Stanley to Bree.

Thus self-actualization is a necessity to all the human beings and the modes that triggers them to be motivated in satisfying their needs and accomplishing the targets of hierarchy of needs differ. This self-actualization is of greater significance to the LGBTQ community and it is their achievement of these targets by Lili and Bree that is effectively portrayed in *The Danish Girl* and *Transamerica*.

REFERENCE

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