

How Do Repeated Acts and Constitutional Pressure Shape the Making of Lili's Transgender Identity in "The Danish Girl" (2015)

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Abstract.

Grounded in Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity and gender constitution, this study examines how repeated acts and constitutional acts shape the making of Lili Elbe's transgender identity in The Danish Girl (2015). Rather than presenting gender as innate or biologically fixed, the film portrays identity as gradually formed through embodied repetitions such as touching fabric, adjusting posture, practicing feminine gestures, and responding to how others look at and interact with the body. The analysis demonstrates that Lili's transition is shaped not only by personal desire but also by constitutional forces, including heteronormative expectations within domestic relationships, social norms in public spaces, and the authority of medical institutions that attempt to regulate and define gendered bodies. Using mise-en-scène and narrative analysis of ten selected key scenes, this study reveals that Lili's transgender identity is produced through performative repetition while being constrained and legitimized by social and institutional systems that determine which gendered identities are considered valid and intelligible, aligned with Butler's Theory.

Keywords: Gender performativity; Transgender identity; Constitutional pressure; Repeated acts; The Danish Girl (2015)

Abstrak.

Berlandaskan teori Judith Butler tentang performativitas gender dan konstitusi gender, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana tindakan berulang dan tindakan konstitusi membentuk pembentukan identitas transgender Lili Elbe dalam film *The Danish Girl* (2015). Alih-alih menggambarkan gender sebagai sesuatu yang bawaan atau biologis yang tetap, film ini menggambarkan identitas sebagai sesuatu yang terbentuk secara bertahap melalui aksi pengulangan yang terwujud dalam tubuh, seperti menyentuh kain, menyesuaikan postur, berlatih gerakan feminin, dan sebagainya. Analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa transisi Lili tidak hanya dipengaruhi oleh keinginan pribadi, tetapi juga oleh kekuatan konstitusional, termasuk ekspektasi heteronormatif dalam hubungan domestik, norma sosial di ruang publik, dan otoritas institusi medis yang berusaha mengatur dan mendefinisikan gender seseorang. Dengan menggunakan analisis *mise-en-scène* dan naratif dari sepuluh

adekan yang dipilih, studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa identitas transgender Lili diproduksi melalui pengulangan performatif seiringan dengan batasan atau legitimasi dari sistem sosial dan institusional yang menentukan identitas gender mana yang dianggap valid dan dapat dipahami, yang dimana sejalan dengan Teori Butler.

Kata Kunci: Performativitas gender; Identitas transgender; Tekanan konstitutif; Praktik berulang; *The Danish Girl* (2015)

Introduction

The Danish Girl (2015) offers a delicate and intimate portrayal of Lili Elbe's journey in discovering and embodying her gender identity. Rather than presenting gender as something fixed or biologically predetermined, the film depicts identity as something that gradually emerges through everyday actions, bodily gestures, emotional responses, and social interaction. Small moments such as touching a soft fabric, adjusting posture, applying makeup, mirroring the movements of other women, or responding to how others look at and address the body become meaningful steps in Einar's transformation into Lili. Through these subtle acts, the film presents gender as something lived and performed rather than naturally given, echoing broader cultural critiques of essentialist views of gender (Connell, 2009).

This perspective closely aligns with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. In *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988) and *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues that gender is not an inner essence or biological truth but is produced through repeated, socially recognizable acts. Gestures, movements, clothing, speech, and bodily comportment do not express a pre-existing gender identity; instead, they are the very practices that create the illusion of a stable gender. When these acts are repeated over time and recognized by others, gender becomes intelligible within a cultural framework (Butler, 1993). From this view, identity is never fully complete or fixed, but continuously shaped by performance, repetition, and social recognition.

Previous studies on gender performativity emphasize that cultural systems give meaning to bodies by attaching symbolic values to biological traits, making categories such as "male" and "female" appear natural even though they are socially constructed (Goodman & Gorski, 2014). Morgenroth and Ryan (2020) further explain that repeated gendered actions help maintain the gender/sex binary, while deviations from these norms can disrupt it and produce what Butler calls "gender trouble." These theories are particularly relevant to

transgender experiences, where identity formation often involves negotiating between personal embodiment and rigid social expectations (Stryker, 2008).

Scholars examining transgender representation in film note that cinema frequently portrays gender transition through scenes of practice and imitation, such as dressing, posing, observing others, and learning gendered movements (Halberstam, 2005; Benschhoff & Griffin, 2006). These visual moments reflect Butler's claim that gender becomes real through repetition and public recognition. *The Danish Girl* participates in this cinematic tradition by focusing on Lili's gradual transformation through bodily acts rather than sudden declarations of identity. However, many discussions of the film tend to focus on historical accuracy, ethical debates surrounding casting, or internal psychological conflict, while paying less attention to how gender identity is constructed through small, repeated gestures and social responses. (Pearce, 2017).

Importantly, *The Danish Girl* also shows that gender identity is not shaped by personal desire alone, but is deeply influenced by constitutional acts, including social norms, domestic expectations, and institutional forces such as marriage and medical authority. Throughout the film, Lili's emerging femininity is repeatedly validated, questioned, or rejected by others, particularly through interactions with her wife Gerda, strangers in public spaces, and medical professionals. These constitutional pressures function as regulatory mechanisms that determine which gender expressions are considered acceptable, normal, or intelligible. Medical institutions, in particular, attempt to pathologize or correct Lili's identity, demonstrating how power operates through science and discourse to control gendered bodies (Foucault, 1978).

By combining Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity with a close, scene-based analysis, this study examines how repeated acts and constitutional pressure shape the making of Lili Elbe's transgender identity in *The Danish Girl*. The paper argues that Lili's identity does not emerge all at once, but is gradually produced through embodied repetition and negotiated through social and institutional recognition. By focusing on micro-performative acts such as touch, posture, movement, naming, and gaze, this study aims to reveal how the film represents gender as a dynamic process formed through lived experience, repetition, and power relations, rather than as a fixed biological or psychological truth.

Method of Research

This study uses a mix of *mise-en-scène* and narrative methods to analyze how *The Danish Girl* (2015) shows gender being performed and reshaped. *Mise-en-scène* analysis looks at everything we see on screen in the scenes, particularly in the characters' gestures and costumes for this case study. It helps explain how the characters' bodily movement and appearances portray the acts of gender performativity. On the other hand, narrative analysis focuses on how the story is told; its structure, key moments, character development, and dialogue, drawing on ideas from Herman (2009) about how narratives create meaning. By applying both methods together, the study looks at how the film's visuals and its storytelling work hand in hand to show Lili becoming herself through repeated actions, emotional interactions, and the responses of the people around her according to constitutional norms.

Result

This research examines ten important scenes from *The Danish Girl* (2015). The analysis focuses on how repeated gestures, movements, expressions, and spoken lines reveal the gradual formation of Lili's gender identity throughout the film.

Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity as the main framework, this study looks closely at how identity develops through repeated actions or embodied practices. Each selected scene is observed from how Einar begins to inhabit femininity and how Lili slowly appears through everyday acts. Through these moments, the analysis highlights how the film portrays gender not as something fixed from birth but as something that grows, shifts, and becomes real through lived experience and ongoing performance.

Repeated Acts Analysis



Figure 1
Gerda asked Einar to wear ballet dress and replaced her model



Figure 2
Einar triggered by the softness of the fabric



Figure 3
Einar posed with more feminine gesture

In this scene [00:10:25 - 00:13:42], Gerda asks Einar to replace Ulla as her model. As he holds the dress, touching the soft fabric seems to awaken something familiar in him. When Ulla jokingly calls him “Lili” and gives him a flower, Einar smiles shyly, then with unexpected joy. As he adopts a ballet pose, his movements shift from imitation to something that feels natural. This moment reveals Einar’s quiet self-discovery through small, embodied changes. The softness of the fabric gives him a comfort absent from his usual masculine clothing, while the flower and the name “Lili” gently affirm a feminine role. Instead of embarrassment, he responds with relief. His posture softens, his movements become lighter, and his body appears more relaxed than it ever does as “Einar.” These subtle shifts suggest that what begins as play feels unexpectedly natural.

As Judith Butler (1988) argues, gender is formed through repeated acts rather than biology alone. This scene shows how simple gestures such as touching a dress, accepting a name, and holding a flower, can open a path toward another identity. Lili does not emerge through a declaration but through sensation, movement, and recognition. In the quiet safety of Gerda’s studio, pretending gently fades into becoming, revealing identity as something that can surface when given space to exist.



Figure 4
Gerda teaches Einar how to apply make up



Figure 5
Gerda teaches Einar how to walk in heels and more feminine

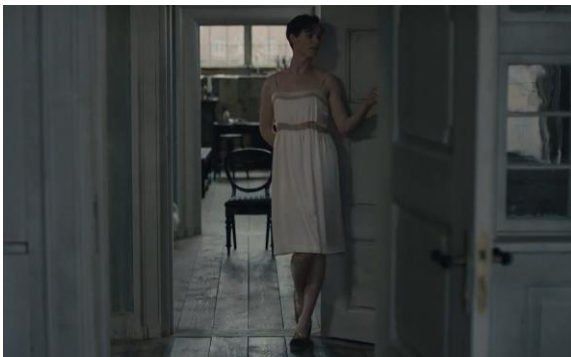


Figure 6
Einar wears Gerda's night gown

In this part of the film [00:23:06 - 00:26:35], Gerda teaches Einar how to present himself more femininely so he can model for her. She shows him how to apply makeup, walk in heels, soften his gestures, and wear stockings carefully. At first he is shy and awkward, as if afraid of being seen enjoying it, but he slowly grows more comfortable. By the second modeling session, he moves without instruction, with fluid and natural gestures. When he tells Gerda, "You excite her," he acknowledges Lili as something real within him rather than a role he is performing. This becomes clearer when he continues practicing alone at night, repeating the movements because they feel right, not because anyone asks him to.

The gestures Einar learns and repeats makeup, posture, walking, and private practice and allow Lili to take shape through the body. What begins as imitation becomes expression, and curiosity becomes self-recognition. The scene shows identity forming gradually through repetition, comfort, and desire, revealing Lili not as a disguise but as a self that emerges when given space to exist.



Figure 7

Gerda brings Einar to a party as Lili and this is Lili's first appearance in public



Figure 8

Lili watches women around him closely and begin to imitating their movement

In this scene [00:27:15 - 00:29:19], Gerda brings Einar to a party where he appears publicly as Lili for the first time, introduced as Einar's cousin to provide a sense of safety. Dressed fully as Lili, he closely observes the women around him and imitates their gestures, the softness of their hands, their posture, their careful movements. As the night goes on, Lili relaxes and begins to enjoy being seen. When a man flirts with her and treats her as a woman, she responds with shy pleasure rather than fear. This public attention gives Lili a sense of freedom and validation, marking a shift from private exploration to social presence.



Figure 9

Einar undressed himself in front of the mirror and slowly folded his penis and pinched it between his thighs to make it look like a vagina.

This scene [00:38:42 - 00:38:58] occurs after Einar is caught kissing Henrik at the party where he first appears publicly as Lili. Confused, distressed, and feeling guilty toward Gerda, he reflects on how the experience made him feel beautiful and seen as someone else. Overwhelmed, he returns to the women's clothing shop, touches the dresses, and stands before the mirror. Alone, he undresses and studies his body with pain and uncertainty, adopting a feminine posture and gently touching himself. His expression shifts from confusion to a quiet sense of relief, suggesting an intimate moment of self-recognition rather than shame.

This moment shows Einar moving beyond external femininity toward questioning his physical body itself. Although he is biologically male, he feels disconnected from the masculine role expected of him, leading him to experience his body as wrong or incomplete. By reshaping his posture and obscuring his genitals, he challenges the idea that gender is determined solely by anatomy. His actions suggest that gender is something deeply felt and embodied, not just defined by physical traits. In this scene, Lili is no longer an experiment or performance, but a truth Einar begins to accept as part of himself.



Figure 11

Einar visited a prostitution house to watch the movements sex worker



Figure 12

Einar started to mimicking the sex worker movements

This scene [00:56:10 - 00:58:02] is one of the most explicit demonstrations of Butler's core claim: gender is not an internal truth but a set of stylized acts that can be learned, borrowed, and reiterated across bodies. The brothel becomes a space where conventional gender norms appear magnified; gestures, seduction, bodily sway, and sensual touch are performed with hypervisibility. These exaggerated forms of femininity expose the constructed nature of gender itself, making it clear that femininity is not natural or instinctive but something enacted. When Einar watches the sex worker and mirrors her movements, the film visually performs Butler's argument that gender identity is produced through imitation of already-available scripts, revealing gender as a cultural archive rather than an innate essence.

The interaction between Einar and the sex worker illustrates how gender performativity is learned through observation and bodily repetition. The sex worker's gestures, arching her back, softening her gaze, parting her lips. represent a culturally encoded femininity tied to erotic labor. Einar mimics these gestures with tentative curiosity, not to eroticize himself but to test how her body can inhabit feminine codes.

Constitution Analysis

Medical Constitution [00:47:37 - 00:50:02]

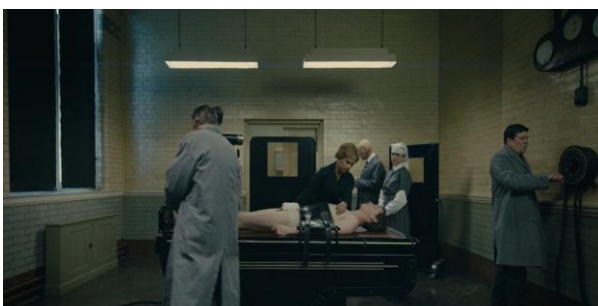


Figure 1

Einar got medical treatment to cure his "illness"

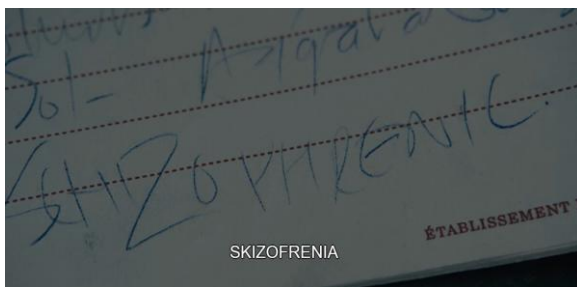


Figure 2

Doctors diagnosed him with mental illness such as schizophrenia

In this scene, the medical authority's diagnosis of Einar as "insane" illustrates the damaging impact of institutional responses to gender nonconformity. Rather than offering the understanding Lili seeks, the doctor acts as a gatekeeper for societal norms, interpreting her feminine identity as a pathological "imbalance" rather than a valid lived experience. This reaction reveals a fundamental inability to conceive of identity outside the rigid male-female binary, turning what should be a neutral medical assessment into a disciplinary tool designed to erase non-conforming identities.

Viewed through Judith Butler's theory of gender constitution, the scene highlights how gender is regulated and validated by social recognition rather than being a purely internal truth. By labeling Einar's transition as a symptom of schizophrenia, the doctor reinforces the idea that femininity in a male body is an "unintelligible" fantasy that must be corrected. Lili's resulting fear and vulnerability stem from this denial of her reality, demonstrating how institutional power maintains control by deciding which identities are considered "normal" and which are dismissed as illness.



Figure 3

Lili met Professor Warnekros to do gender-affirming surgery

In this scene, Lili's decision to undergo the first-ever gender-affirming surgery highlights the intense friction between gender performativity and the material body. While Lili has successfully reconstituted her identity through feminine gestures and clothing, her male-assigned body remains a site of "unintelligibility" in a society that demands physical alignment with cultural norms. Her plea to "take it away" underscores the limitations of social performance when faced with rigid bodily expectations; she feels she must physically transform to escape the misrecognition imposed by a society that refuses to read her as a woman so long as her anatomy remains unchanged.

Furthermore, the interaction with Professor Warnekros illustrates the role of medical institutions in legitimizing identity. According to Butler, institutions do not just observe gender; they actively produce the categories that make a person "real" in the eyes of the law and society. By entering this medical structure, Lili seeks a "bodily rearticulation" that only scientific authority can provide. However, this process requires her to frame her own body as an error or a pathology to be corrected. Warnekros acts as the ultimate gatekeeper, demonstrating how institutional power dictates the terms under which a non-conforming subject is allowed to become socially recognizable.

Heteronormative Constitution [01:11:08 - 01:14:15]



Figure 4

Lili erasing her makeup because Gerda asked her to bring Einar as her husband back



Figure 5
Lili wearing Einar clothes and acted as Einar to please Gerda

In this emotional moment, Gerda confronts Lili with desperation. Overwhelmed and tearful, she begs, "I need my husband," pleading for Einar to return. Lili then replied with "I can help you with that", but it is not what Gerda asked. She wanted to talk with Einar in his masculine form, not as Lili, and Lili said that she cannot do that. Gerda's desperate plea for her "husband" highlights how marriage functions as a social institution built on stable, binary roles. Her grief reflects the collapse of a culturally prescribed narrative, the "husband and wife" dynamic, which relies on compulsory heterosexuality. When Lili attempts to mimic Einar's masculine gestures and clothing to comfort Gerda, the performance fails and feels unnatural. This struggle illustrates Butler's theory that gender is a repeated act; once the internal identification is gone, the performance becomes an impossible burden that leads to profound emotional distress.

Eventually, Lili's inability to "resurrect" Einar is a powerful assertion of her authentic self over societal expectations. By rejecting the pressure to perform her assigned gender, she chooses self-preservation over a role that no longer fits her embodied experience. This scene emphasizes that gender is not merely a costume one can put on or take off; it is a coherent identity formed through alignment between the interior self and outward expression. Lili's refusal to comply demonstrates the high emotional cost of breaking away from binary norms to achieve personal visibility.

Family Constitution [00:46:42 - 00:47:48]



Figure 6

Einar told Gerda that when he was a child, he was scolded and beaten by his father for kissing a boy named Hans.

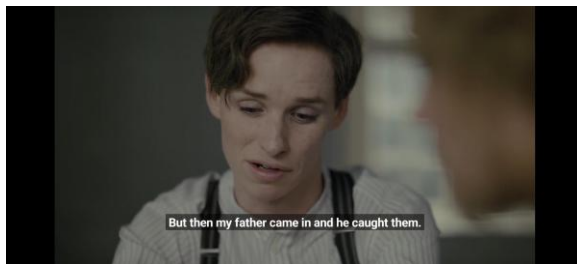


Figure 7

Einar told Gerda that Lili's existence became real to him at that time

At this scene, Einar tells how, when he was a child, he was scolded and beaten by his father for kissing a boy named Hans. It was at that moment that Lili's existence became real to him. This scene illustrates how the family acts as the primary "constitution," using authority to enforce gender norms. Einar's memory of being beaten by his father for kissing a boy marks the moment Lili's identity was suppressed by physical and moral coercion. According to Butler's theory on the *Psychic Life of Power*, power shapes an individual's self-perception from childhood, often making social rules feel like personal choices. In this context, the father's violence was an attempt to discipline Einar into a "normal" masculine identity, forcing him to internalize the societal expectation that Lili's existence was a violation of moral values.

Extracting on Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, the family serves as the first site where a person's identity is shaped by what society deems "true" or "normal." The father's aggression was not just a personal outburst but a defense of the nuclear family structure, designed to ensure Einar would grow into a heterosexual husband. By punishing non-conformity, the family functions as a disciplinary tool that attempts to erase identities like Lili's before they can fully form. This shows that Einar's struggle is not just internal, but a direct result of institutional power working to maintain a rigid, binary path.

Discussion

Representation of Gender Identity and Embodiment in *The Danish Girl*

In *The Danish Girl*, gender identity is portrayed as a deeply embodied and emotional process rather than a fixed biological truth. The film presents Einar's transition into Lili through quiet, intimate scenes that emphasize bodily awareness, repetition, and self-reflection. One of the most significant moments occurs when Einar, overwhelmed by his first public experience as Lili, returns to the women's clothing shop. There, he slowly touches the fabrics, observes himself in the mirror, and eventually undresses. This scene visually communicates that gender identity does not begin with language or public declaration, but through physical sensation and personal recognition.

The mirror functions as a critical symbolic space where Einar negotiates his sense of self. His expressions shift from confusion and pain toward calmness and relief, suggesting a temporary alignment between inner feeling and outward form. Rather than framing this moment as deviant, the film treats it with sensitivity, allowing Lili's emergence to appear sincere and deeply felt. Huttunen et al (2019) argues that transgender identity is often grounded in embodied knowledge, where the body becomes a site of truth rather than contradiction. The film supports this idea by prioritizing gesture, touch, and posture over verbal explanation.

Challenging Biological Fixity and Bodily Meaning

The film strongly challenges biological determinism—the assumption that anatomy alone determines gender identity. Although Einar is biologically male, *The Danish Girl* repeatedly shows his discomfort with the expectations attached to masculinity. This discomfort becomes most visible when he is alone with his body, suggesting that the conflict does not arise solely from social performance, but from a deeper misalignment between bodily form and personal identity (Saidah et al., 2022). The act of reshaping his body in front of the mirror symbolically questions the authority of biological sex as the foundation of gender (Kartini & Maulana, 2019).

Recent scholarship emphasizes that sex gains meaning through social interpretation rather than biological inevitability. Connell (2009) argues that bodies only become gendered through cultural frameworks that assign value and expectation (pp. 47-50). In the film, Einar's distress stems not from his body itself, but from what that body is required to signify. Medical professionals reinforce this rigidity by interpreting his femininity as pathology rather than identity, illustrating how institutions participate in stabilizing gender norms rather than accommodating differences.

Gender Identity, Repetition, and Family Constitution

Beyond individual embodiment, the film highlights the role of family as a core social agent shaping gender identity. Gender identity formation in preschool-aged children is a process shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, and broader social influences (Briella, 2024). Families are the main agents of cultural values in someone's early life stage, which includes spreading the idea of gender perspectives. According to Bourdieu's (1979) theory of cultural reproduction, certain norms that are developed in the family environment have the power to challenge or maintain the dominant social hierarchies actively. Research by Barmawi and Silmi (2016) demonstrates that family constitution influences identity formation long before adulthood through parental expectations, moral authority, and repeated regulation. One case in their study shows how conflicting parental desires and gendered naming produced identity ambiguity from birth. This closely parallels Einar's experience, where a strict father enforced masculinity through violence, suppressing the presence of Lili as a legitimate self.

Another case from the same study shows that when a central moral authority figure disappears, the subject experiences a loss of direction that allows alternative identities to emerge. Even without physical violence, family power continues through constant reminders to conform to what is considered "normal," functioning as a form of repeated regulation. As Butler (1997) explains, such regulatory power both produces identity and generates inner conflict when it is contradictory. For Einar, the memory of his father's anger becomes an internalized law, making expressions of femininity feel like moral violations rooted in early family trauma.

These findings are reinforced by Ningsih and Syafiq (2014), who found that transgender identity formation is shaped by both internal feelings present since childhood and external factors such as parenting patterns, gendered social environments, and family acceptance. Research by Ryan et al. (2010) through a survey of LGBTQ+ young adults proves that the level of parental acceptance has a direct impact on mental health and an individual's ability to validate their own gender identity, where family support serves as a major protective factor. This is supported by Kad-Wise et al. (2016) through interviews with some parents. It was found that parents' openness to rethinking the concept of gender in the family greatly determines the smooth development of a child's identity, where parents who accept this change provide healthy gender exploration, while rigid attitudes tend to hinder the formation of a child's identity.

Together, these studies emphasize that family participation, through acceptance, rejection, or ambiguity is a crucial part of the constitution that shapes how gender roles are understood and lived within society.

Heteronormativity and Relational Breakdown

The film also demonstrates how heteronormative expectations regulate intimate relationships. Relationships are often culturally structured around fixed gender roles that give them social legitimacy. When one partner transitions, these roles become unstable, producing grief, confusion, and emotional distress. Research shows that cisgender partners frequently experience reduced intimacy and relationship satisfaction, particularly when facing stigma and difficulty accepting the transition (Schuler et al., 2025; Smithee et al., 2023).

This process is often described as a "co-transition," where cis partners undergo their own emotional and social adjustment alongside the transgender partner (Ockerman et al.). From a performativity perspective, relationships depend on the repetition and recognition of gendered roles (Butler, 1988). When those performances change, the relational structure built upon them can no longer be sustained. Empirical studies confirm that identity transformation, stigma, and relational strain are common experiences for couples navigating gender transition (Lewis et al., 2021; Park et al., 2024). This shows that gender transition is

not only an individual process, but a relational one constrained by heteronormative cultural frameworks.

Medical Authority and Institutional Regulation

Medical institutions play a key role in regulating gender legitimacy. Butler (1988) argues that gender becomes real through repeated acts that are socially recognized and institutionally supported. Within the medical constitution, doctors function as gatekeepers of legitimacy. Medical institutions play an important role in maintaining strict gender norms, where the health system often indirectly shapes inequality by not paying attention to gender-sensitive needs and by reaffirming traditional gender roles in patients (Hay et al., 2019). This condition is rooted in the history of medical education, which in the late 19th century, there was a limitation of female role practitioners by directing them to specific fields, such as pediatrics, in order to conform to the dominant social norms of the time (Sumual, 2023). This shows that through educational policies and clinical service patterns, medical institutions function as a controlling tool that sets the boundaries of authority and gender behavior that are considered appropriate in society. Because Einar's feminine expressions do not align with culturally accepted masculine norms, they are interpreted as symptoms of illness rather than as valid identity expressions.

This portrayal mirrors historical treatment of gender nonconforming individuals. Morgan and Rodriguez (2020) explain that LGBTQ individuals in the early twentieth century were frequently pathologized and subjected to corrective treatments aimed at enforcing conformity. The doctor's recommendation for further intervention reflects this legacy, showing how medicine often functioned as a mechanism of control rather than care. Lili's distress highlights a crucial tension: while identity emerges from within, dignity and safety depend on whether institutions are willing to recognize that identity as legitimate.

Cultural Meaning and Contemporary Relevance

Overall, *The Danish Girl* presents gender identity as a complex process shaped by embodiment, repetition, family constitution, relational norms, and institutional power. By focusing on gradual becoming rather than dramatic transformation, the film aligns with contemporary gender scholarship that understands identity as fluid, relational, and deeply

lived. It challenges dominant narratives that frame gender as fixed and biologically determined, instead revealing how identity unfolds through practice, recognition, and resistance.

Through Lili's journey, the film illustrates that gender is neither invented nor imitated, but patiently formed through everyday acts of self-recognition within, and often against, social structures. As such, *The Danish Girl* offers a culturally grounded representation of how gender identity is negotiated within family, relationships, and institutions that both shape and constrain the possibility of becoming.

Conclusion

This study examines *The Danish Girl* (2015) through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, investigating the construction of gender identity as a result of repeated actions rather than biological sex. Through close examination of selected scenes, this research establishes that Lili's identity does not appear as a rigid or abrupt realization. Rather, it evolves gradually through embodied activities including gesture, posture, attire, movement, and social contact. These repeated performances grant femininity to become significant and essential, both internally and socially.

The results suggest that the film depicts gender as a continuous process influenced by repetition and societal acknowledgment. Lili's behaviour, which originally comes out as moments of experimentation, derive into persistent patterns of performance that challenge the masculine identity assigned to Einar. According to Butler's reasoning, gender in the film becomes understandable only when these behaviors are viewed within a cultural context and acknowledged by others. Characters such as Gerda, Henrik, and the wider society serve as social audiences whose responses add to either the acceptance or destabilization of Lili's emerging identity.

Furthermore, the approach emphasizes the contradiction between performative identity and the material body. While performative acts allow Lili to assert and declare her gender, the film also highlights the limits of performance within a society that imposes rigid gender binaries. Lili's frustration with her male-assigned body and her choice to pursue medical transition demonstrate the cultural pressure for bodies to conform to socially legible

gender expectations. This establishes that the body is not a neutral or passive element, but one that is actively managed and interpreted through dominant discourses of gender.

Additionally, the movie shows how relational and emotional conditions, in addition to personal desire, influence gender identification. Lili's relationship with Gerda mirrors the intricacy of negotiating identity within intimate spaces, where love, loss, and support coincide with disorientation and pressure. Their interaction demonstrates that gender transformation impacts not only the person but also social relationships built around standard gender norms.

Overall, *The Danish Girl* (2015) offers gender as a continuous and fragile process formed by embodiment, repetition, social interaction, and cultural constraints. This research contributes to conversations about gender portrayal in film by illustrating how cinema may depict the nuanced, slow, and sometimes contested construction of transgender identity using Butler's theory and comprehensive scene analysis. The film eventually questions essentialist notions of gender and asks viewers to examine identity as something that is constantly created through lived experience rather than established by biology.

Implication

Through *mise-en-scène* and narrative analysis based on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, this study shows that *The Danish Girl* (2015) depicts transgender identity as a slow process formed through repeated embodied acts and constitutional pressures from medical, relation, and family institutions. The study proves that Lili's identity develops through practice and power rather than intrinsic essence (born with the desire of becoming woman naturally) by closely analyzing small performative gestures, bodily repetitions, and instances of institutional acknowledgment or rejection throughout certain situations, which is aligned with Butler's theory. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how gender performativity functions not only within texts but also within larger social and cultural systems, future research may go beyond performative analysis at the surface level to investigate audience reception, emotional labor, or intersectional factors like class, race, or nationality that possibly influence how one's gender identity performed.

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