Unveiling the Lived Experiences of Tomboys: A Qualitative Study

Saman Amin[1], Amber Baseer[2*], Shagufta Shaheen[2]

Abstract

The present study explores the lived experiences of tomboys. Phenomenology research design was used for this study. Six participants were recruited via snowball sampling. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data. Thematic analysis was done to analyze the data. Four major themes emerged through analysis namely; social aspects, psychological aspects, personality factors, and gender characteristics. The foremost implication of this research is in social welfare by creating awareness for a gender minority like tomboys, and presenting them in natural light. It can be used for policy making by public and private institutions. It will be useful for both institutional and private counselors to understand lived experiences of tomboys and work with them accordingly. The findings of the research can be used by human rights organizations to create gender equality in Pakistan.

Keywords: In-depth Interview, Gender Minority, Phenomenology, Snowball Sampling, Thematic Analysis

[1]BS (Hons) Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Central Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
[2]Lecturer, Department of Psychology, University of Central Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author Email:
ambarbaseer79@gmail.com

Introduction

Particularly in heteropatriarchal countries such as Pakistan, the notion of the 'tomboy,' though frequently reduced to oversimplified definitions, represents a complicated framework of gender expression, social norms, and personal identity. This study delves deeply into the tomboy identity, revealing its facets within the cultural framework of Pakistan.

The meaning of "tomboy" lies at the core of this research. A 'tomboy' is, in the words of the Merriam-Webster dictionary (1998), "a girl who behaves in a manner usually considered boyish." Though widely acknowledged, this explanation only touches the tip of the intricate relationship that exists between gender, culture, and personal experience. When you hear the word "tomboy," you probably picture young girls with short hair who like sports and other traditionally masculine activities more than more feminine ones like playing with dolls. Still, the subtleties of tomboyism are not adequately captured by this imagery.

Going a step further, Bailey et al. (2002) offers a more complex viewpoint, characterizing tomboys as females who challenge current sex-typing theories in addition to displaying behaviors that are typically associated with men. This point of view goes beyond simple behavioral tendencies to explore gender expression and identity in greater detail. The tomboy identity has deeper significance and implications in Pakistan, a country known for its rigid adherence to gender norms. Here, expressing one's gender gives one more advantage in society, whereas expressing one's gender makes one more vulnerable to objectification and is often seen as a sign of weakness.

The multifaceted nature of sex-typed behaviors adds to the complexity of tomboyism in the Pakistani context. These behaviors, according to Martin et al. (2002) ought to be seen as a spectrum that permits an individual to have a combination of characteristics that are typical of both men and women. Given this framework, it is interesting to consider what behaviors set tomboys apart from other girls, and how these behaviors are viewed and valued in the context of their society.

Diverse opinions are revealed by research on how tomboys are perceived. Tomboy behavior, especially in childhood, is generally seen favorably by peers and teachers, according to studies (Kleiber & Hemmer, 1981). Tomboys are frequently thought of as popular, cooperative, helpful, and supportive. Reay (2015) adds that both boys and girls use the term "tomboy" as a sign of respect. This implies that tomboy behavior can be a socially acceptable and even celebrated part of female childhood, despite the possible stigma attached to gender nonconformity.

However, there is still complexity in the relationship between tomboyism and masculinity. While Paechter and Clark (2007) and Morgan (1998) suggest that tomboys broaden their interests to include both masculine and feminine activities, other studies suggest that tomboyism is strongly associated with dominant masculinity. Likewise, McGuffey and Rich (1999) highlighted in their study that being a tomboy entails embracing masculine traits while rejecting feminine ones, thereby adhering to regional standards of masculine conduct. They also pointed out that a boys' function as gatekeepers in peer groups also affects this dynamic, implying that girls are frequently accepted in boy-centric activities only if they openly reject feminine characteristics.

Regarding transient gender-based safeguards inside social structures, the tomboy identity has consequences as well. Tomboyism, according to Craig and LaCroix (2011), offers a kind of transient protection against gender-based prejudices, but it is unable to fully transcend the binary gender system. Moreover, the results of another study by McConaghy and Zamir (1995), concluded a weak correlation between tomboyish behaviors in childhood and adolescence and the sexual orientation that follows, serve as more evidence for this.

One recurrent theme in the literature is the contemporary aspect of the tomboy identity. Girls frequently describe themselves as "a bit tomboy," according to Paechtera and Clark (2007), underscoring the temporary and frequently ambiguous nature of this identity. The continuing existence and growth of tomboy identities and behaviors as girls grow into women are interesting questions that are raised by this observation. Tomboys have been the subject of a sizable number of studies worldwide, despite the fact that these studies differ greatly from one another. According to Phillips et al. (2005), there is a significant overlap between lesbian and bisexual communities. Specifically, 77 percent of lesbian and bisexual women and 63 percent of heterosexual women reported being tomboys as children. However, McConaghy and Zamir (1995) found that the majority of women's tomboyish behaviors during childhood and adolescence are not significantly correlated with the reported ratio of homosexual to heterosexual feelings. In US culture today, being a tomboy is a multifaceted identity that many women and girls find meaningful. Research indicates that being a tomboy, as a gendered social identity, also offers women and girls short-term "protections."

Morgan (1998) concluded that tomboys may be more likely than other girls to enjoy hanging out with boys. Gender identity, specifically the degree of comfort with one's assigned sex and the desire to belong to the opposite sex, is another likely area of difference. Rather than cognitive gender identity, which refers to thinking one is a girl versus a boy, we are more interested in

affective gender identity. The affective component's distribution varies widely, from moderate ease and unquestioning acceptance of assigned sex to severe discomfort and rejection. The meaning of "tomboy" might be changing and impacted by culture. He also highlighted that older women were less likely than younger women to remember childhood tomboyish behavior. Moreover, Thorne (1993) pointed out that many children do not identify as "tomboys," in contrast to adults. Therefore, it is essential to take this study's cultural context into consideration.

Object Relations Theory
According to Chodorow's (1978) psychoanalytic object-relations approach biological sex forms the basis of gender identification. Therefore, women identify more with their same sex daughters then with their opposite sex sons. Hence mothers encourage their sons to separate then their daughters. Chodorow further explained that this biological assignment to sex forms the reason why children passively accept gender identities because they do not have any other choice.

Gender Schema Theory
Gender schema also known as the dual-pathway gender schema theory. This theory emphasizes individual differences in forming gender identity. It proposes two pathways that highlight the relation between an individual's behavior and attitude. The first pathway or the attidudinal pathway suggest a relation between an individual's behavior and attitude in forming gender identity. For example if a girl enjoys playing with dolls as compared to trucks she is more likely to opt for dolls and refrain from playing with trucks. The second pathway also known as a personal pathway model propose that an individual's interest has a significant affect on their attitudes and behavior. For example if a boy enjoyed playing with a kitchen set then he will form a gender schema that kitchen set can be used as a toy by both girls and boys (Liben & Bigler, 2002).

Literature Review
Qualitative studies on tomboys are carried out from both empirical and non-empirical perspectives, broadening the scope of the research. Empirical research frequently focuses on issues related to adult or childhood androgynous behavior or the possible long-term effects of tomboyish behaviors in childhood. Because tomboyism is retrospectively reported in over 50% of adult women in a significant number of researches, most of these studies acknowledge it as a common aspect of female childhood, providing insights into the developmental and psychological dimensions of this identity (Burn et al., 1996). The non-empirical documentation of this psychological research typically originates from literary and cultural studies and is primarily derived from autobiographies or fictional works. These kinds of non-empirical research view tomboyism as a relatively rare phenomenon that represents an extreme form of masculinity in females. It is not pathological, but it does give rise to a persistent sense of outsider status (Rottnek, 1999).

There are several real limitations to qualitative research studies when approached from these angles. Only a small number of these studies have been conducted outside of the US; the majority are from the US (Jones, 1999). According to Safir et al. (2003), these factors account for the variations across cultures in the definitions and occurrence rates of this phenomenon across all studies. Because the majority of research on tomboys is retrospective and examines adult recollections of childhood, problems with selective recall become their greatest shortcoming (Bailey & Zucker, 1995).

According to Reay (2015) and Thorne (1993), studies have demonstrated that adults are more likely than children to use the term "tomboy" when remembering about their early years. The main focus of current research is gender identity, adult transsexuality, child gender identity

disorders and their relationships to adult tomboy gender expressions, and the correlations between childhood tomboyish behaviors and a variety of adult behavioral features, including adult lesbianism (Bailey et al., 2002; Gottschalk, 2003; Safir et al., 2003; Zevy, 1999), transsexualism (Minter, 1999a, 1999b), androgyny (Burn et al., 1996; Kleiber & Hemmer, 1981; Paechtera & Clark, 2007) and participation in sports (Giuliano et al., 2000; Goldberg & Chandler, 1991). The true nature of being a tomboy, how tomboys relate to their peer group, and how this changes as adolescence approaches are not well-studied topics.

Children who identify as tomboys are typically accepted by their peers, both male and female. Tomboys are seen by peers and teachers as popular, cooperative, helpful, supportive of others, and leaders, according to one of the few studies to focus on them as young people (Kleiber & Hemmer, 1981). Both boys and girls used the term "tomboy" as a sign of respect, according to Reay (2015). According to McGuffey and Rich (1999), pre-adolescent girls who disregarded gender norms did not face social stigma from their peers, which lends credence to the idea that tomboy behavior is a common and unproblematic feature of childhood for girls.

While a few scholars (Paechtera & Clark, 2007; Morgan, 1998) contend that tomboys broaden their interests to include both masculine and feminine activities, other studies indicate that tomboyism and dominant masculinity are highly comparable; tomboyism is defined as embracing masculine characteristics while rejecting femininity. More extreme tomboys may be perceived as adhering to local standards of masculine behavior by establishing and maintaining their status as honorary boys, indicating the greater value they place on these behaviors. This could be because boys, especially the more powerful ones in the group, serve as gatekeepers for tomboy behavior, allowing only a select few girls to play games meant for boys and boys alone (McGuffey & Rich, 1999). Girls

may therefore only be accepted as regular participants in boys' play groups if they openly reject femininity.

Likewise Craig and LaCroix (2011) proposed that girls and women receive temporary "protections" from tomboyism as a gendered social identity. Tomboys' potential to genuinely transcend the binary gender system is hampered by the protections they receive, which are only transitory. Moreover, McConaghy and Zamir (1995), there is only a weak correlation between women's reported feelings of homosexuality to heterosexuality and tomboyish behaviors during childhood and adolescence. Although some girls identified as "a bit tomboy," it was uncommon for them to do so without any issues (Paechtera & Clark, 2007).

Furthermore, Bailey et al. (2002) labels girls who act like boys and defy certain sex-typing theories as "tomboys." Regardless of one's sexual orientation, being a tomboy is the identity that a person with a female sex identity uses to express their masculine gender, as opposed to transmen. There hasn't been much tomboy research done. A few studies have examined attitudes or beliefs regarding tomboys (Martin et al., 2002). There are, as of right now, just two comprehensive studies that use parent-identified tomboy participants.

However, Green et al. (1982) compared parent-referred tomboys and non-tomboy girls on several traits deemed to be associated with tomboyism, such as playmate preferences, interests and activities, and gender identity. This report is comparable to the first one. Despite significant differences between girls who identified as tomboys and girls who did not, the measures used were limited to parent reports. If we look at them separately then, Martin et al. (2002) conducted early research that focused more on attitudes towards tomboys than on their experiences. Nonetheless, two noteworthy studies offer fundamental understanding. The first was a set of research by Green et al. (1982) that

examined a variety of tomboyism-related traits, such as interests, preferred playmates, and gender identity, between parent-referred tomboys and non-tomboy girls. Even though the studies' reliance on parent reports may have limited the depth of knowledge, they did highlight important differences between the two groups.

Similarly, tomboys and other children were the subjects of a second study by Paechtera and Clark (2007) that examined sex-typed interests. The results indicated that tomboys were more interested in traditional male activities than other girls. The second study's sample had two potentially significant flaws. Firstly, tomboys were probably not very extreme because they were a self-selected group. For instance, self-reports typically show that over half of women and girls identify as tomboys (Hyde et al., 1977). Moreover, some of the participants were in the tenth grade, which is an older age range for someone to be referred to as a tomboy.

Some female players were also influenced by cultural norms to take on this tomboyish appearance, which benefits their families and themselves. Since there is not a male in their household, some females have taken on this identity. This gesture serves as a protective barrier for both girls and women. The entire family feels safe as well. Some females may also adopt this identity to defend their families (Meisel, 2023). The idea of adopting a tomboy identity is growing quickly thanks to several Disney dramas, novels, and films that portray the tomboy look i.e, playing strong female roles in the tomboy gesture (Golden & Jacoby, 2018).

The early tomboy was seen as a parody of dominant masculinity, which was meant to make male masculinity seem authentic (Higginbotham, 2018). The tomboy look is primarily associated with more democratic views of other people but potentially negative gender identification. It was linked to play preferences that are typically associated with men (Ahlqvist et al., 2013). According to Bailey et al. (2002), this flexible personality role reflects in accepting people who defy gender norms, even though doing so puts them at risk of social rejection (Egan & Perry, 2001; Halim et al., 2011). The majority of research conducted in South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Australia has concluded that female athletes' gender patterns encouraged a profound and significant involvement in athletic performance (Bartholomaeus, 2012; Kostas, 2022; Renold, 2004). However, not all girls take on the tomboy gesture of male dominance (Kostas,2022).

Another study conducted by Halim et al. (2011), suggested that although many girls identify as tomboys, not much is known about their lives. Tomboys don't conform to gender norms and might be more conscious of the disparities in gender status. Tomboys may have lower self-esteem because they may feel different from other people and more acutely perceive the lower status of their gender group. However, a lot of tomboys also like playing sports, which frequently results in increased self-esteem. Two studies attempted to separate how athleticism and tomboy identity interact to affect self-esteem. Research 1 included 144 female undergraduates, while Research 2 included 66 girls between the ages of 8 and 13. Only the less athletic participants in both studies showed a negative correlation between their current self-esteem and their childhood self-identification as a tomboy. Tomboys with high athletic stature had high self-esteem. All of these results point to the possibility that athletics can shield tomboys from low self-esteem.

Rationale

Though this topic has a wide scope in our everyday life interactions but there is no notable research that has been conducted on the lived experiences of tomboys in Pakistani culture and society. This can also be a contributing factor to the lack of awareness about this community allowing the way for possible discrimination. An interesting point to notice is that regardless of certain notable challenges on a daily basis, a noticeable number of biological

females do identify and behave as tomboys in the very heteropatriarchal cultures, like Pakistan. Such females in layman terms are regarded to as 'Mai-munda' or 'tomboy' by Pakistani culture. The term tomboy, which originally was a derogatory term now has been reclaimed by the queer community as a term for a respectful identification terminology, is going to be used in this research.

Research Question

- What are the lived experiences of tomboys in Lahore?

Method

Research Design

The research design of this study was phenomenology. This study was conducted to understand the lived experiences of tomboys. In phenomenological research methodology, the researcher looks for data that describes how people experience a phenomenon and their feelings regarding it (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2008).

Participants

The sample consisted of six women who identify as tomboys enrolled in undergraduate studies, unmarried, and belonged to middle class which age ranging from 18-25 years. A sample size between 3-10 was suggested by Creswell (2014) since data gradually become saturated after conducting fifth interview. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) recommended that sample size of less than 20 participants increase validity of the research. Therefore, six participants were recruited from different universities of Lahore via snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are asked to suggest other potential participants who meet the study's eligibility criteria (Goodman, 1961). The exclusion criteria for our research includes transmen, lesbians, and gender dysphoric individuals.

Data Collection

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with six tomboys. Indepth interviews are a qualitative research method used to gather comprehensive data about an individual's experiences, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). These interviews consist of pre-determined questions which were derived from theories reviewed in literature. Interviewing techniques proposed by Kvale and Flick (2007) were utilized in conducting interviews it included introductory questions questions such as what does being a tomboy mean to you? What are the issues you face by identifying as a tomboy? In your opinion tomboy is your gender identity or gender expression? Relevant probes were also acquired where necessary such as what does your family think about or perceive your gender expression?

Procedure

The firstly approved was taken from the Institutional Review Boards of the University. Then necessary permissions were taken from other universities to gather data. Six tomboys were recruited via snowball sampling. Written informed consent was taken from the participants, providing an explanation of the study's purpose and seeking permission for audio recording their interviews. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and were assured that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. No risks were anticipated for the present study. The researcher remained supportive and non-judgemental throughout the interview in order to encourge the participants to genuinely share their narratives. Rapport building was also done in order to make the interviewees comfortable. Martins (2023) stressed that building rapport with the participants should be a priority to emphasizing the importance of establishing a genuine connection based on sincerity and transparency which in turn fosters trust. The duration of the semi-structured interview was approximately one hour. Following the interviews, the data was transcribed promptly.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used was thematic analysis. In thematic analysis the researcher generates codes from the transcript of all the interviews then sub-ordinate themes are merged into main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hence, in this study the data was collected through at least one hour interviews from each participant. The interviews were then transcribed. Important and specific codes were generated and sub-ordinate themes along with superordinate themes were identified. These codes, main and subordinate themes are represented in Table 1. Four major themes emerged through this in-depth analysis.

The following steps are involved in thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1.   Data familiarization in which the researcher process the transcription of data of the conducted interviews again and again

2.   Initial coding generating in which researcher made the codes like exact words from the transcription

3.   Search for themes based on the initial coding in which based on the codes from the transcription, sub-ordinate themes emerged

4.   Review of themes

5.   Theme definition and labelling in which the researcher lace the themes that occur commonly and give these themes names/label

6.   Report writing

Results

The intricate and varied lives of tomboys in Pakistan are explored in this qualitative study, which reveals a wealth of experiences ranging from social to psychological to personal to gender-related. Four main themes have emerged from the thematic analysis of the phenomenological data, each providing a distinct opening into the lives of these people. The findings of this research shows that:

Social Dynamics and Challenges

Tomboy experiences and society expectations are intricately intertwined, as illustrated by the first major theme, "Social Aspects". This theme includes the sub-themes of "Social Pressure" and "Social Judgement", which highlight the intense scrutiny and social obstacles these people face. The stories shared by the participants paint a picture of a society characterized by prejudices, familial demands, and an ongoing battle for acceptance in society. Their accounts of vulnerability, support, and occasionally overt harassment provide a vivid picture of their daily interactions with society.

Psychological Landscape

We delve into the inner lives of tomboys under the heading of "Psychological Aspects", examining how societal perceptions affect their psychological health. The internal conflicts and mental health difficulties that these people deal with are highlighted by the division of this theme into "Psychological Constructs" and "Psychological Issues". The participants' shared experiences with anxiety, social energy dynamics, and the process of internalizing cultural norms helped to paint a complex picture of how their gender expression affected their psychological well-being.

Personal Identity and Traits

Tomboys' choices and personal characteristics are clarified by the "Personality Factors" theme. It provides insights into how these people view their identities and how it affects their personal choices. It is broken down into "Choices" and "Personality Traits". This theme reveals the variety of personality traits that characterize tomboys' self-image and lifestyle decisions, ranging from creativity to introversion and from fashion choices to an air of unapproachability.

Voicing Gender Expression

Finally, the "Gender Characteristics" theme explores how tomboys identify with and express their gender. The "Gender Identity" and "Gender Expression" components of

this theme show how participants negotiate the challenging landscape of gender roles and expressions. They talk about their experiences with androgynous looks, feminine fashion, and the empowering power of identifying as one's gender. Summarizing the results, here are some key points:

• Tomboys resist and challenge the traditional social norms associated with male and female identities, while also internalizing these norms, which can have a significant impact on their developmental phase. Tomboys are defined as both a gender expression and a gender identity.

• Although it might seem like a choice, being a tomboy is more a reflection of these people's need for comfort than a conscious choice.

• Being a tomboy is not always bad; in fact, it's a more common phenomenon than most people realize. Tomboys face a variety of psychological, social, personal, and professional challenges as a result of social perceptions and influences. Below is the table for themes (Table 1).

Table 1
Themes and Codes (N=6)

Themes	Sub-ordinate categories	Codes
Social Aspects	Social Judgements	Stereotypes
		Different way
	Social Pressure	Family pressure
		Judgement
		Vulnerability
		Social approval
		Support
		Harassment
		Authority
		Objectification
		Accepting
Psychological Aspects	Psychological Constructs	Anxious
		Conscious
	Psychological Issues	Panic attacks
		Triggering
		Tantrums
		Social anxiety
		Social energy
		Comfortable
		Internalization
		Unwanted attention
Personality Factors	Choices	Identity
		Choice
	Personality Traits	Introvert
		Intimidate
		Black attire
		Silver accessories
		Unapproachable
		Creativity
		Neutral

Gender Characteristics	Gender Expression	Gender roles
		Feminine attire
	Gender Identity	Androgynous
		Appearances
		Confidence
		Empowered
		Protection

Theme 1

Social Aspects is first superordinate theme present in the collected data. It entails two major subordinate themes i.e., social perception and social pressure. As participant one stated; *"I do have certain tendency to stay away from stereotypes in our society this specifically include a lot of gender roles".*

Theme 2

Psychological Aspects is second superordinate theme which is prominently present in the collected data. It includes two subordinate themes of psychological constructs and psychological issues. As participant four said;

"I will tell you subjective view and then an object, my objective view on a tomboy as a girl who wants to be a boy or wants to appear as a boy, subjectively I think a tom boy is who somewhere deeply has a desire to be a man".

As participant two said;

"ky people use to call me lesbian in university it effected my mental health a lot, and I was so depressed that even I had a panic attack. Even if in the present day someone do calls me a lesbian, I just start having a panic attack"
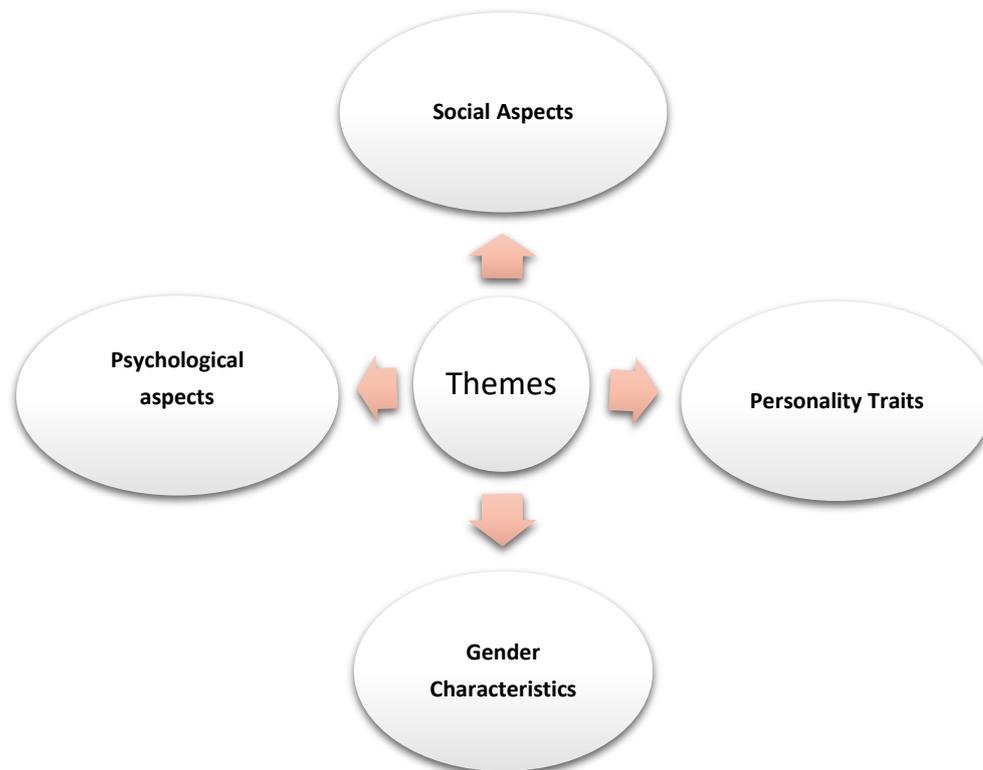
Theme 3

Personality Factors is the third most prominent superordinate theme which is prominently present in the collected data. It includes two subordinate themes of choices and personality traits. As participant one said;

"It's like, I don't want to, like, it's my choice to have shorter hair, which suits my personality".

Theme 4

Gender Characteristics is fourth superordinate theme which can be identified from the transcribed data. It includes two subordinate themes of gender identity and gender expression. As participant one said;

"Just because I dress a certain way does not mean that I don't consider myself a girl. A woman can dress very masculine in and still be very feminine, I think it's my gender expression".

Figure 1
Thematic Map Showing the Major and Sub-ordinate Themes

Figure 2
Thematic Map Showing the Major and Sub-ordinate Theme
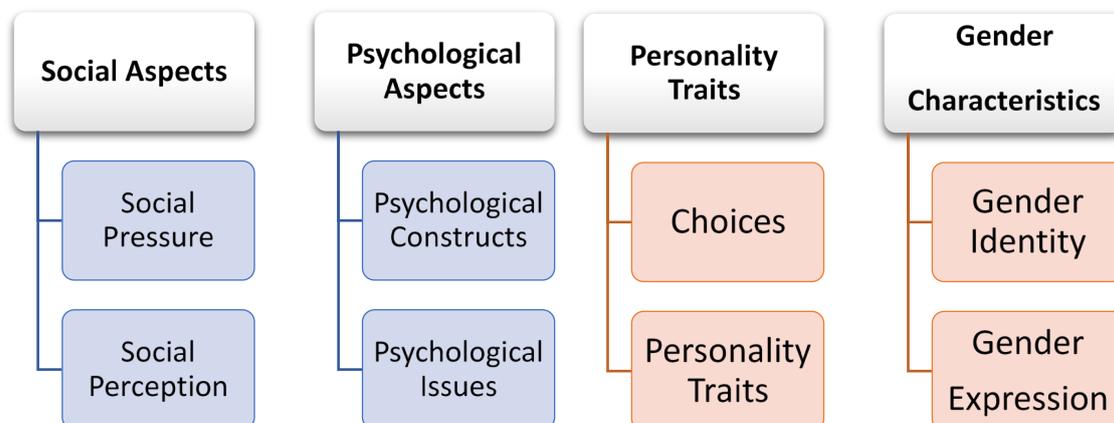
Discussion

The study discusses how Pakistani tomboys negotiate their identities in the context of a complicated cultural fabric. Tomboys from Pakistan frequently do not openly identify as "tomboys," in contrast to how tomboyism is perceived in the United States. This difference, which is largely due to stereotypes and cultural norms, emphasizes the special relationship between gender expression and cultural identity. In this situation, being tomboyish protects people from harassment and discrimination based on their gender in addition to acting as a means of gender expression. This result is consistent with Craig and LaCroix (2011) theory regarding tomboyism as a gendered social identity that provides momentary security.

The study reveals that the tomboy identity is linked to a feeling of empowerment. Participants said that breaking conventional

gender roles by dressing and acting more like men gave them a sense of confidence and agency. But there are social constraints associated with this empowerment as well. Tomboys have advantages, but they also encounter prejudice because of their sexual orientation, pointing to a complicated relationship between gender expression and social acceptance. It's interesting to note that the study contends that tomboys may benefit from specific advantages due to their gender expression in the workplace, including protection from harassment. This result supports Martin et al. (2002) theory that sex-typed behaviors are multidimensional, with people displaying a combination of traits associated with both men and women.

More extreme tomboys can be perceived as adhering to local standards of masculine behavior by establishing and maintaining their role as honorary boys, indicating the greater significance they place on masculine customs. This could be because boys, especially the more powerful ones in the group, serve as gatekeepers for tomboy behavior, allowing only a select few girls to play games meant for boys (McGuffey & Rich, 1999).

The study emphasizes how important family support is to tomboys' overall well-being. Improved personal and professional outcomes are correlated with a supportive family environment, while psychological and social challenges are made worse by an absence of support. The prevailing 'Rishta culture' in Pakistan, which prioritizes arranged marriages, presents tomboys with additional difficulties, frequently resulting in social disapproval and stigma. The study also observes a change in perceptions of tomboys across generations. Tomboys find it simpler to interact socially and romantically with younger generations because they seem to be more accepting of them. This change represents a slow but steady change in how society views gender nonconformity. Likewise, the findings of the study by Bailey et al. (2002) also align with existing literature, tomboys are girls

who act and behave like boys and who reject the gender binary. It was also concluded that 'Tomboys' are girls who act like boys and defy certain sex-typing theories.

While Pakistani tomboys do not consider themselves to be "tomboys," they do agree with the definition of a tomboy and acknowledge that they fit certain characteristics. Although some girls identified as "a bit tomboy," it was uncommon for them to do so without any issues (Paechtera & Clark, 2007). It is suggested that their reasons for not identifying with a particular label are different from those of American culture, most likely due to prejudice and stereotypes. Literature also affirms that tomboy is a gender expression rather than a gender identity. The available literature does not support this finding, and cultural differences are the likely cause. Tomboys accept that people use their gender identity as a shield against misogynistic discrimination, harassment, and other forms of abuse. According to Craig and LaCroix (2011), tomboyism as a gendered social identity also offers women and girls momentary "protections."

Conclusion

Four major themes emerged through analysis namely; social aspects, psychological aspects, personality factors, and gender characteristics. Each of the themes that arose from the interviews was detailed which reflect the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of participants about discrimination and being deviant from traditional conceptions of both males and females. As a result, there were some similarities among them, but there existed differences in their experiences of discrimination and the level of impact that these had on them. Although tomboys are rebellious, more independent, and more assertive than contemporary traditional women of Pakistani culture they continue to face social and psychological issues because of the way Pakistani society works and is discriminatory towards every

individual that is slightly tangential from the fixed boxed and labeled categories of man and woman including tomboys.

Implications

This research was conducted for the creation of unbiased record of lived experiences of tomboys in Pakistan for the first time because there is no relevant research that has been conducted on this particular area. The research not only breaks the traditional monotony of researches in Pakistan. It instead questions a lot of our beliefs and perceptions about the world we live in and about the people around us. It suggests that even those individuals who are different, non-conforming, or as per say deviant from the said culture are not too new or strange to us. They are just like any other person dealing with a lot of facets in life.

The foremost implication of this research is in social welfare by creating awareness for a gender minority like tomboys and presenting them in natural light. It can be used for policy-making by public and private institutions to introduce measures to reduce gender biases. Policy making can also include introducing counseling services in educational institutes to further cater the problems faced by tomboys. More students from psychology, gender studies or other social sciences may carry on this study or use it as authentic literature in the future. It will be useful for both institutional and private counselors to understand the lived experiences of tomboys and work with them accordingly. It can be used by relevant NGOs and human rights movements that work for gender equality in Pakistan.

Limitations

This research was one of its kind but it had various limitations which can be further carried on to advance knowledge in this particular topic. These limitations include:
One of the major limitation was scarcity of indigenous literature on the issue. Secondly, incorporating quantitative measures could provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon and

validate qualitative findings. Moreover, research participants were only six and belonged to a specific socio-economic and educational status. Therefore, future research could include a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the representativeness and generalizability of the findings.

Contribution of Authors

Saman Amin: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft
Amber Baseer: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision
Shagufta Shaheen: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [A.B.] upon the reasonable request.

References

Ahlqvist, S. Halim, M. L. Faith K. Greulich, L. E. & Ruble, D. (2013). The Potential Benefits and Risks of Identifying as a Tomboy: A Social Identity Perspective. *Self and Identity. 12* (5), 563-581.

Bailey, J., & Kortte, K., & Berenbaum, S. (2002). Who Are Tomboys and Why Should We Study Them? *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 31,* 333-41.

Bailey, J. M., & Zucker, K. J. (1995). Childhood sex-typed behavior and sexual orientation: A conceptual analysis and quantitative review. *Developmental Psychology, 31,* 43–55.

Bartholomaeus, C. L. (2012). *Rethinking masculinities and young age: Primary school students constructing gender* [Unpublished

Doctoral dissertation], University of Adelaide.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

Burn, S. M., O'Neil, A. K., & Nederend, S. (1996). Childhood tomboyism and adult androgyny. *Sex Roles*, *34*, 419-428.

Chodorow, N. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender.* University of California Press.

Craig, T., & LaCroix, J. (2011). Tomboy as protective identity. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 15*(4), 450-465.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Crouch, M., & McKenzie, H. (2006). The logic of small samples in interview-based qualitative research. *Social Science Information*, *45*(4), 483-499. https://doi.org/10.1177/053901840 6069584

Dahlberg, K., & Dahlberg, H. (2008). Reflective Lifeworld Research. *An Open Lifeworld Approach*, *2*, 95-121.

Egan, S. K., & Perry, D. G. (2001). Gender identity: A multidimensional analysis with implications for psychosocial adjustment. *Developmental Psychology*, *37*(4), 451-463.

Giuliano, T. A., Popp, K. E., & Knight, J. L. (2000). Footballs versus barbies: Childhood play activities as predictors of sport participation by women. *Sex Roles*, *42*, 159-181.

Goldberg, A. D., & Chandler, T. J. (1991). Sport participation among adolescent girls: Role conflict or multiple roles? *Sex Roles*, *25*, 213-224.

Golden, J. C., & Jacoby, J. W. (2018). Playing princess: Preschool girls' interpretations of gender stereotypes in Disney princess media. *Sex Roles*, *79*, 299-313.

Goodman, L. A. (1961). Snowball sampling. *Annals of Mathematics Statistics, 32*(1), 148-170.

Gottschalk, L. (2003). Same-sex sexuality and childhood gender non-conformity: A spurious connection. *Journal of Gender Studies*, *12*(1), 35-50.

Green, R., Williams, K., & Goodman, M. (1982). Ninety-nine "tomboys" and "non-tomboys": Behavioral contrasts and demographic similarities. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 11*, 247–266.

Halim, M. L., Damut, E., Greulich, F. K., Ahlqvist, S., Lurye, L. E., & Ruble, D. N. (2011). The role of athletics in the self-esteem of tomboys. *Child Development Research*, 1-9. doi:10.1155/2011/830345

Higginbotham, J. (2018). *Queering Childhood in Early Modern English Drama and Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hyde, J. S., Rosenberg, B. G., & Behrman, J. A. (1977). Tomboyism. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *2*(1), 73-75.

Johnson, J. M., & Rowlands, T. (2012). *The SAGE handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft*. Sage https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452 218403.n7

Jones, O. (1999). Tomboy Tales: The rural, nature and the gender of childhood. *A Journal of Feminist Geography, 6*(2), 117-136.

Kleiber, D. A., & Hemmer, J. D. (1981). Sex differences in the relationship of locus of control and recreational sport participation. *Sex Roles*, *7*, 801-810.

Kostas, M. (2022). 'Real'boys, sissies, and tomboys: exploring the material-discursive interactions of football, bodies, and heteronormative

discourses. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 43(*1), 63-83.

Kvale, S., & Flick, U. (2007). *Doing interviews*. Sage.

Liben, L. S., & Bigler, R. S. (2002). "The Developmental Course of Gender Differentiation: Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Evaluating Constructs and Pathways." *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 67(2). 1-183.

Martin, C. L., Ruble, D. N., & Szkrybalo, J. (2002). Cognitive theories of early gender development. *Psychological Bulletin*, *128*(6), 903-933.

Martins, J. (2023, January 9). 6 ways to build Rapport & develop work relationships. Asana. https://asana.com/resources/building-rapport

McConaghy, N., & Zamir, R. (1995). Sissiness, tomboyism, sex-role, sex identity and orientation. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, *29*(2), 278-283.

McGuffey, C. S., & Rich, B. L. (1999). Playing in the gender transgression zone: Race, class, and hegemonic masculinity in middle childhood. *Gender & Society*, *13*(5), 608-627.

Meisel, F. (2023). From Tomboy to Amazon: The Psychoanalytic Treatment of Two Girls, Unhappy with Their Gender Identity, and the Impact of Title IX. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, *76*(1), 107-122.

Merriam-Webster (Ed.). (1998). Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary (10th Ed.). Springfield, Merriam-Webster.

Minter, S. (1999a). Diagnosis and treatment of gender identity disorder in children. *Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood*, 9-33.

Minter, S. (1999b). *Sissies and tomboys. Gender nonconformity and homosexual childhood*. New York University Press.

Morgan, B. L. (1998). A three generational study of tomboy behavior. *Sex Roles*, *39*(10), 787-800.

Paechtera, C. & Clark, S. (2007). Who are tomboys and how do we recognize them? *Women's Studies International Forum, 30*(4), 342-354.

Phillips, S. H., Richardson, J., & Vaughan, S. C. (2005). *Oxford Textbook of Psychotherapy*. Oxford University Press.

Reay, D. (2015). *The impact of gender, race and class on learning dispositions in schools*. Sage.

Renold, E. (2004). *Girls, boys and junior sexualities: Exploring childrens' gender and sexual relations in the primary school*. Routledge.

Rottnek, M. (Ed.). (1999). *Sissies and tomboys: Gender nonconformity and homosexual childhood*. New York University Press.

Safir, M. P., Rosenmann, A., & Kloner, O. (2003). Tomboyism, sexual orientation, and adult gender roles among Israeli women. *Sex Roles*, *48*, 401-410.

Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. Rutgers University Press.

Zevy, L. (1999). *Sissies and tomboys: Gender nonconformity and homosexual childhood*. New York University Press.