Breaking the Binary and Promoting Tolerance:

*Identity, Race, Sexuality and Gender in Jackie Kay’s Trumpet*

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

This essay explores how Jackie Kay’s novel *Trumpet* can work to educate and promote tolerance and understanding of diverse identities that suffer discrimination due to binary social rules. *Trumpet* shows Kay’s progressive thinking and brings awareness to the community of those who do not identify with predominant social values. The novel empowers individuals that do not conform to perceived social norms. Jackie Kay has experienced herself what it is like to be in a minority group, growing up and living as a mixed-race lesbian in Scotland and not feeling a sense of belonging. She has used her life story as a platform for her writing. *Trumpet* has themes of social acceptance, identity crisis, racism and gender discrimination. The novel was published in 1998, exactly 20 years ago, and still has relevance to this time. With Kay’s use of different strand narration in the form of a memoir, we gain insight into the diverse mindsets of the characters and their values regarding race, gender and sexuality, and see how crucial it seems to be able to categorize and label individuals in order to accept them. The novel tells the story of Joss Moody, a happily married, famous, respected jazz trumpeter that following his death is discovered to have been living his life as a transgender man. His “truth” becomes a media frenzy and his son Colman and wife Millie are left with questions and emotions that are hard to bear, Colman questioning his heritage and identity as a black man and Millie fearing ridicule and accusations of being lesbian. The novel is inspired by and loosely based on the true life of Billy Tipton, an American jazz musician that was secretly transgender. The essay highlights aspects of Kay’s novel that are valuable for teaching the history and culture of minority groups for a better understanding.
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1. Introduction

Social minorities, such as people in the LGBTQIA community and people experiencing prejudice due to their race, have been fighting a difficult battle for equality, and still are. However, in some countries we are seeing a positive change and a decrease in strong binary categorization. For instance, in Iceland the personal pronoun “hán” is being more frequently used; it applies to someone non-binary that does not identify as male or female or someone gender fluid, which applies to a person whose gender identity changes over time. In Sweden there is a “gender-neutral” preschool which does not define children by their gender (Hebblethwaite BBC News). Same sex marriages are becoming legal in more countries and people in western countries are showing more tolerance for individuals that do not fit within socially accepted norms. Overall there is a growing understanding and support for the battle for equality that people in minority groups are fighting.

Jackie Kay is one of the first Scottish authors to shed light on the topic of these identity struggles with her award-winning novel, *Trumpet*, published in 1998. Today, 20 years later, this topic is still sensitive and minority groups are still struggling to gain recognition of their identity in binary society. In Kay’s novel she challenges binary standards and values and what they mean for people that do not necessarily fit within them. The novel especially covers themes of gender and race and explores how the main characters interpret themselves and others in relation to binary values in Scottish and English society.

*Trumpet* is loosely based on and inspired by the true story of Billy Tipton, a secretly transgender jazz pianist, but also by Jackie Kay’s personal experience of growing up as an atypical individual in a very traditional, binary Scottish society. In *Trumpet* the biracial character Joss Moody is a successful and a passionate trumpet player. He unexpectedly passes away from illness, leaving behind his loving wife and adopted son. It is then when the reader learns that Joss was biologically born a female and that most of his life Joss had been living as a transgender. The novel shows various characters’ reaction to Joss’s transgender status through different strands of narration. *Trumpet* truly exemplifies how binary mainstream social judgements can be and epitomises society’s need to define and categorize an individual’s identity, for instance
in terms of gender and race. The social discourse on binary gender identity has taken a
giant leap and Kay’s book reveals her progressive thinking and insight into the world of
those who do not identify with predominant social values. Trumpet is a powerful story
that could be used to educate teenagers and young people about understanding and
tolerance and the necessity to challenge the norms of society. By examining the theme
of identity discrimination in the novel and the impact the protagonist’s death has on the
narrators of the story, we see how important education is for a shift in prejudice against
people whose racial, sexual and gender identity is seen as outside the mainstream
or/norms of society. Kay’s novel could be a powerful tool to help further the cause of
social minorities that want to challenge the binary categorisation of core values held by
society.

2. Background

Imagine being born and raised in a country but never feeling a sense of belonging due to
lack of social acceptance. This is a feeling that Jackie Kay, an award-winning author,
literary talent and Scottish Makar, knows all too well. Life for a black adopted girl
brought up in a predominantly white Scotland was a struggle and her life story is
astounding. Kay comes from a mixture of backgrounds, with her birth mother being
Scottish and her birth father Nigerian. She was born in 1961 in Edinburgh and given up
for adoption to a white, Glaswegian, working-class socialist couple, Helen and John
(Rowell). Kay’s lesbian sexuality is yet another aspect of identity that she has written
about to defy the binary attitude. Her works have a recurrent theme of a search for
identity and belonging as well as social discrimination. These themes can all be found in
her first novel Trumpet. Kay has received recognition for many of her powerful works
as a novelist, poet and playwright, but also for publishing literary work for children.
Kay is a very prolific author, she has won numerous awards for her works and was
named Scotland’s new Makar, or national poet, in 2016 (Brooks). She studied at the
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and Stirling University, where she read
English (Tranter). Her first published work was a collection of poetry called The
Adoption Papers (1991), which is inspired by her own experiences and life story.
Trumpet was awarded the 1998 Guardian Fiction Prize. It is no wonder considering
Kay’s own life story that most of her work has a recurring theme of identity, whether it being national identity, cultural identity, gender based identity, sexual identity or, the most prominent, racial identity.

Kay has expressed her view that identity in any form is fluid. Some countries and cultures are more advanced and open to different people and identities, some are more multicultural than others and that is why she now lives in Manchester rather than Scotland (Rowell). Binary social views stem from politics. There is a need for strong non-binary oppositional politics in every society. As AnaLouise Keating writes: “Oppositional politics have been crucial, enabling people from oppressed groups and other social-justice actors to seize agency, develop subversive forms of resistance, and redefine themselves in empowering ways” (6). As long as oppositional politics are broad and not restricted, schools and educators can use these politics in their teaching methods to win social justice and go against the grain of binary logics so that oppressed groups can find safety and belonging. This can be in the form of teaching the diverse history and culture of minority groups. Jackie Kay’s work can be seen to have educational values because of her challenging discourse on identity and minority groups and her work is being taught in schools not only in Scotland but in other countries as well, such as at the University of Iceland.

The collision of Jackie Kay’s complex identity was a starting point for her writing. Random Acts did a creative short video about her called “Scottish Laureate Jackie Kay on Growing Up Black and LGBTQ in a White Family”. There she expresses how as a child she felt surprised by her own reflection in the mirror, as if she were a stranger to herself because she was not like any of her friends or family members (Random Acts). Living in Scotland she belonged to a true minority group of British blacks, since according to National Statistics publication for Scotland, only 1% of the Scottish population belongs to the African, Caribbean or Black groups. Through her work, Kay has tried to give this minority group a voice, while demonstrating racism surrounding black individuals living in modern Scotland. She says that “There is a funny thing when people accept you and don’t accept you. I love the country, but I don’t know if the country loves me” (Brooks). Her work can be used as a tool for tolerance, for people living in modern society that are not met with understanding and in some instances, are feared for having unconventional identities that are not within the usual binary structure.
Her work enlightens those that are not aware of the consequences following the prejudice accruing against people with unusual identities concerning their race, gender and sexuality.

As mentioned before, *Trumpet* is loosely based on the true life of Billy Tipton, an American professional jazz pianist. It was discovered following his death that he was assigned female at birth without friends or family ever knowing. The similarities between Joss and Tipton are evident. Born Dorothy Lucille Tipton, she was a US citizen and at the age of nineteen transitioned from female to male, and died at age 74 from an untreated haemorrhaging ulcer (Middlebrook xiii). Joss also dies of the same cause. Tipton had many relationships with women and even adopted three sons with Kitty Oaks. Tipton’s body was practically still warm when the truth came out about his secret and tabloids were quick to cover the story. The coroner rang the media and Tipton’s youngest son, William, gave permission for an interview (Middlebrook 5). This is similar to Colman’s story in *Trumpet*, as he is working with a journalist too and Colman’s name was William before he was adopted. Tipton’s wife Kitty and Joss’s wife Millie also share the feeling of not wanting the world to know the secret, fearing what others might think. The public’s reaction to Joss’s and Tipton’s “true” identities are also similar, as people felt tricked by the news about Tipton and it got spread all over the country, similar to the scenario portrayed in *Trumpet*. In Diane Wood Middlebrook’s book, *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton*, she writes: “death in the provincial western city of Spokane, Washington, made news all over the world, not because Billy was a well-known musician, but because the scale of the deception and the scarcity of explanations endowed the skimpy available facts with the aura of myth” (xiii). The thought that gender is a feeling, a mind-set in our brains but not something that is due to our biological sex, was not yet understood by the majority of society at the time of Tipton’s death, but it certainly existed. It is frightening to think of the unbearable pain that Billy Tipton and Joss Moody must have gone through as they were dying. Elderly individuals are more prone to getting illnesses so being secretly transgender and seeking healthcare must have been complicated for Tipton and Moody due to lack of understanding about transgender individuals and uncertainty about whether or not the health care system would accept them. As Loree Cook-Daniels writes: “The implications of a health care crisis include the possibility of health
professionals’ refusal to treat a transgender person, having to fight to be placed in the appropriate sex-segregated room or ward, and having to explain to multiple health care providers why one has a “noncongruent” body” (30). There is also the fear of their hormonal medication, that is necessary for their transition, to be confiscated from them or being met with prejudice from medical care workers (Cook-Daniels 28). As was the case for Tipton, being transgender is life threatening for Joss Moody. This goes to show how biased society can be to gender labelling and how there is discrimination against minority groups which leads individuals like Joss Moody and Billy Tipton to feel like “vulnerable outsiders who run the risk of ridicule, neglect and death, their position too tenuous to be tenable” (Walker 42). By looking at the tragic final fate of both Billy Tipton and Joss Moody, Kay exemplifies the seriousness of not fulfilling the social binary standards, as well as defying the taboos surrounding non-mainstream identities. As a result, her novel is very significant and inspiring for people that are battling against binary values and the prejudice directed towards those that do not conform to perceived social norms.

3. Trumpet: Plot and Theme

Trumpet is about the life and death of Joss Moody, a famous Scottish, black, jazz trumpeter and the revelation of his assigned female biological sex after his death. It is a modern work of fiction happening in 1997 but with recollections from the 1960’s. Themes of social acceptance, identity crisis, racism and gender discrimination are brilliantly articulated through the narrative of the main characters. Joss, like Kay, has a passion for jazz and Kay’s way of writing makes the text feel rhythmic at times to get a better feel for Joss and his music. The only person with knowledge of Joss being transgender is his wife Millie. Millie is in a state of absolute heartbreak and sorrow after his death; she is distraught that the couple’s secret has been revealed because now people are going to judge her for all the wrong reasons. She is terrified that people will think that she is a freak or a lesbian. She flees from London to escape from the media frenzy and goes to their cottage in a small village in Scotland to get peace and to reminisce about their past. Joss and Millie’s son Colman is a wreck after his father’s death, feeling angry, shocked and humiliated due to finding out about his father being
transgender. He is an unstable character with identity issues and is desperately trying to find himself even if it means selling his father’s story to a prejudiced reporter. He is, like his father, a black Scottish male with no notion of his heritage and experiencing life in racist surroundings.

The novel addresses issues such as love, grief, relationships, music, fixed and fluid identities and prejudice. Kay gives the reader a sense of how society can react to deviant characters like Joss Moody and his family and how opinions can shift. It shows racial discrimination and prejudice against gender identity. In Kay’s novel it is as if characters feel deceived because they were not privy to the truth about Joss Moody’s biological gender, because labelling and categorizing others seems to be essential for acceptance. For them, the line between the sexes is clear cut so they try their utmost to turn Joss back to his female identity after his death. Difference is viewed in oppositional terms so anything that is not complimentary to the usual binary is considered opposite, which leads to an either/or system (Keating 3). This results in a big gap between different social groups, which is why it is so important to inform and teach citizens about the limits of binary categorization and about the fluidity of identities and increase education about social justice to reduce discrimination and welcome equality.

4. Racial Discrimination

White supremacy exists all over the world. Discrimination against any kind of race should not be something to opt for, rather a thing to unlearn. In her book, *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Classroom Dialogues*, AnaLouise Keating writes:

Racialized categories are built on a series of brutal, exclusionary practices. They originated in histories of oppression, manipulation, land theft, body theft, soul theft, physical and psychic murder, and other crimes against specific groups of people. These categories were motivated by economics and politics, by insecurity and greed - not innate biological or divinely authorized differences. (5)

This being said, it does not mean that we should have a “colour-blind” outlook because that would undermine the history of various races and deny accountability for former racial discrimination (Keating 7). It is important to teach their real history and culture
for a better understanding and to decrease social injustice. Jackie Kay’s writing serves as educational by showing her own experiences with racism in her country. With her work, Kay tries to cover the truth of diaspora and racial discrimination existing especially in her home country of Scotland. She uses her own racially challenging issues of citizenship in Scotland as a platform. As Brown states, “It is post-devolution Scotland’s specific articulation of inclusive citizenship, and the reconstitution of the nation’s social and symbolic space enabled by this articulation, which inform much of her writing” (Brown 220). Kay writes both before, during and post devolution Scotland. Kay explains the situation of her own writing within the debate on national identity and the divisions that pervade Scottish literature (Brown 220):

Most Scottish people are aware of how England has treated them and how they’ve suffered like the Irish at the hands of the English and how the English have so many stereotypes of Scottish people... What interests me particularly is the way in which you can be in a society that is cordoned off and oppressed but also be oppressed within the society, or divided within that or not belong to the common group in the same way. I do think that sense of being outside with being inside Scotland – with being very proud of the country and very proud of being Scottish, and also being outside in terms of receiving a lot of racism from other Scottish people – is what fuels my sense of how and what I write. (Gish 179-80)

Kay has experienced racial discrimination in her own native country. Her work is empowering for those that are experiencing discrimination due to their race and shines light on the racism permeating modern society.

5. Challenging Binary Views on Gender

With her use of multiple strand narration and exploration of themes of identity discrimination, Kay gives insight into how social binary views and prejudice exist in society in her novel Trumpet. Information about diverse identity is important. Kay demonstrates this importance by showing the narrators’ prejudiced misperception concerning gender and sexuality. As an author and a lesbian member of a racial minority group, Kay has given the marginalized a voice and uncovered the prejudice of
binary logic; therefore her works have educational value. It is a common misconception that gender identity and sexual orientation always go hand in hand. The need to be able to categorize other people’s sexual orientation seems to be key for acceptance. Many are not aware that homosexuality, or any kind of sexual orientation for that matter, and being transgender, for example, are not synced together, but rather that the two are independent concepts. Sam Killermann, an author and gender and sexuality educator, gives a good explanation on this: “Gender is who you go to bed as, sexual orientation is who you go to bed with” (National Geographic). Gender is not to be defined by the biological parts that make out our bodies, but rather by what we feel in our minds is our gender identity. There are a lot of different existing gender identities. Sexuality is something that you cannot necessarily classify, as it is very flexible and fluid. With more public education about the difference between sexual orientation and gender on one hand, and biological gender and gender identity on the other, ignorant speculations and binary logic will hopefully give way to a more open and enlightened discourse about these core parts of human nature. Kay champions diversity and makes readers aware that there is no single truth when it comes to individuals living in a society.

The characters in *Trumpet* show mixed reactions to Joss being transgender, the most prominent being ignorance. Today, twenty years after the novel’s publication, there is a better understanding of various gender identities and works by authors like Jackie Kay can be used as a powerful tool to increase awareness of the challenges that people with unusual gender identities face when living in a society with binary values.

6. Joss Moody: Gender

Those who make the social transition of becoming “transgender” are: “people who live their lives in a social gender that is not the gender they were assigned at birth “(Schilt, Westbrook 441). Joss Moody was once Josephine Moore, born with female reproductive organs, a girl, a woman, a she. She, like everybody else, was given a preassigned role because of her sex, a gender role, an ideal socially accepted role according to her gender. Josephine did not fit into this pre-assigned role, nor do any non-transitional transgender individuals. Josephine was Joss, a boy, a man, a he, but above all a jazz trumpeter.
Joss was a kind, handsome man and extremely proud of his Scottish identity. Despite living in a very nationalistic country, where Joss is considered an outsider, he still feels extremely patriotic about Scotland and shows a desire to belong. Here Kay shows how for Joss “a Scottish origin bestows Scottish citizenship” (Brown 225). All he wants is acceptance from his country. In London, he was “Determined that everyone would know he was Scottish” (Kay 51).

Keeping his born female gender a secret was essential for him because of his knowledge of the constant need for gender categorizing and the prejudice caused by not belonging to a strictly female or male category. His gender identity and his gender expression was that of a male. In her article on Trumpet, Alice Walker writes:

In a society that is obsessed by the question “What are you?”—a question that speaks to a deep need to categorise and authenticate individual identities—the cross-dresser functions as a disorderly and subversive presence: by resisting assimilation within a system of binary oppositions, he or she reveals the inadequacy of this system, and, furthermore, questions the extent to which appearance and identity are coextensive. (35)

Gender and identity is no singular logic; it can be fluid, flexible and non-binary (Walker 35). Millie expresses a very apt metaphor for different identities and various selves when she talks to Maggie the cleaner about the Russian Matryoshka dolls: “We’re all like that, aren’t we? We’ve all got lots of little people inside us” (Kay 173). Many transgender individuals are ashamed of their transgender identity because they do not see anything in their culture that encourages them to talk about it (Bornstein 8). Furthermore, some transgender individuals might have to deal with some risks when they decide to transition, such as threatened job security, negative social reputation, issues with health insurance and rejection from friends and family. For these reasons, Joss Moody kept his biological female gender a secret.

This novel is a memoir told by other characters than Joss and “Between them, they articulate the cultural norms and boundaries of the social history depicted in the text, which, divided as it is into 35 sections, preserves and deconstructs Joss” (Hargreaves 6). As a result, we never get the narration from Joss directly nor through his thoughts, but rather we only get to know what we are told by the narrators. His transgender identity
was a secret to all but his wife Millie and Joss and Millie’s relationship was full of love, passion and mutual respect. Some characters feel as though they have been tricked by not knowing the fact that Joss was born female. The binary vision is so strong that after his death people wonder how they could ever have missed it as, he looked so womanly. Reactions of disgust are shown by the public. Sophie Stone the reporter is trying to find a good catchy word for her book, thinking that “Transvestite has a nice pervy ring to it” (Kay 126). Joss was not even a transvestite, but transgender, a man. This goes to show how ill-informed the public is about gender identities and how hard it is for the individuals that do not fit the binary social rule.

Various characters in the novel share the opinion that biological sex is an imperative to define one’s identity. Institutions like the morgue and media try repeatedly to return Joss back retroactively to his “natural” identity (Brown 225) and no privacy nor respect is given. For example, the doctor writes “female” in capital letters with her red invasive pen on Joss’s death certificate: “She looked at the word ‘female’ and thought that it wasn’t quite clear enough. She crossed that out, tutting to herself, and printed ‘female’ in large childish letters” (Kay 44). The urge of the tabloids is to try and find Joss Moody’s “real” identity when in fact he was living his real identity as a transman. Another example of how people feel the need to turn Joss back to his female identity is when Sophie Stone writes to Millie that “I’d like to talk to you about her too” (Kay 41). The media also assumes that his life must have been a wreck. This shows the authorities’ and society’s view of how important gender categorizing is to be accepted in society and how gender is ranked the highest in defining identity. Before Joss’s death he was adored in the jazz industry and considered to be a cool cat, but after his death and the realization of his biological sex, he is stamped as deviant and people’s reaction to the news is appalling. Thus Kay’s novel shows how manipulative both the state as well as people in general can be towards gender and sexuality. As Tracy Hargreaves states: “It is the stark intransigence of the State’s desire to thus regulate and control sex that Kay’s novel responds to, underlining not only the inadequacy of such attempted control but also the paucity of the assumptions that prompt it” (7). This social need and pressure on having to articulate and show what gender you truly are is orthodox but at the same time so mindless.
Joss was able to fool everybody so the obvious question posed by the novel is, what is the meaning of a “real” gender? In *Trumpet*, Kay brings out a powerful question of whether sex and gender labelling is something reliable or real: “We question the notion that somebody who lives their life as a man and is discovered to be female at the time of death was really a woman all along. What is “really” in this context? What is the force of that reality? Transvestites Anonymous Group (TAG)” (Kay 159-160). Joss acted in a manly way, he dressed as a man, and therefore people thought he was a man. Jazz was Joss’s life, something he used as a kind of escape, a liberation tool that stripped off every prejudice: “He loses his sex, his race, his memory” (Kay 131). When Joss is listening to jazz, Millie recollects, “I feel as if I’ve lost him, that he belongs to the music and not me” (Kay 17). He fashioned himself around his music and the sound of his trumpet horn could strip him down to his core (Brown 225). A female jazz player was not common in the 1960’s so speculations of whether Joss’s male appearance was to become more successful as an artist are vaguely valid, even his own son has those speculations. Colman is trying everything to find answers as to why his father transitioned, not understanding that in his mind, heart and soul, Joss was male. He did not convert to male because he loved jazz, he converted because he was male and happened to love jazz as well, and these were his two separate identities.

7. Millie: Sexuality

The only person that knew the secret about Joss being biologically female was Millie. Their love was true, unconditional and filled with mutual respect, but following Joss’s death Millie worries that her son will never speak to her again. She feels an unease and fear of what others will think of her, that they might think she is perverted or freaky. She is shocked by the reaction from the media because it makes their relationship look like something bad. Millie is baffled by this because she never saw anything strange or twisted about their loving, heterosexual marriage. Unlike Colman, Millie does not feel like she was living a lie: “I felt like I was living a life” (Kay 95). There was nothing bad about their secret, she says: “Our secret was harmless. It did not hurt anybody” (Kay 10). This just establishes how important it is for some people to have “normal” identities concerning appearance, personality, sexuality and gender to avoid prejudice.
Joss showed Millie his secret early in their relationship, which shows how remarkable his love for her is right from the start, as if he knew he would be with her forever:

He is undoing the buttons of his shirt . . . I’m excited watching this man undress for me . . . Underneath his vest are lots of bandages wrapped around his chest . . . “Did you have an accident? I don’t care about superficial things like that.” I go towards him to embrace him. “I’m not finished,” he says. He keeps unwrapping endless bandages. I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small, firm. (Kay 21)

Millie’s concern about other people’s opinions is evident throughout the text. She does her best to guard Joss’s masculinity (Hargreaves 6) and makes it clear to the reader that she is not lesbian even though nothing in her narrative shows anything other than a heterosexual relationship (Walker 41). She tries her best to re-inscribe false accusations about Joss’s “real” gender and homosexuality. Millie describes their intimate sex life where Joss is the possessive, dominant partner. After the sex she says, “He is smiling. Full of himself. I am weak. I am totally and utterly loved” (Kay 197). She also reminisces, “We make love on the living-room floor. He pulls my hair and kisses me all over my face. He pushes himself into me” (Kay 36). Her sex life with Joss is described in heterosexual terms, and certainly without an indication of a lesbian relationship, and we also need to remember that initially Millie falls in love with a man, before actually knowing that Joss was born a female. However, because Millie’s narration is not fully reliable it is possible that she is withholding information in fear of being judged by others and thus the reader cannot know the true nature of their relationship and their sex-life.

To read about the interracial relationship of Joss and Millie is very powerful. Millie never shows any sign of racial prejudice. But Millie was not met with understanding by her family for marrying a black man, some of them not even wanting to attend their wedding: “I didn’t want to believe it of them. I didn’t want to believe my own mother could be prejudiced in that way. […] People should keep to their own, she said. Then she said the word, ‘Darky’. I don’t want you marrying a Darky’” (Kay 26-27). Millie’s love for Joss is so important that she threatens not to see her mother again after that prejudiced comment.
After their marriage came Millie’s longing for a baby. That was an immense problem for her because she knew that Joss could not impregnate her: “Why can’t he give me a child? He can do everything else” (Kay 37). She becomes obsessed with having children and cannot bear seeing a child without crying (Kay 37). It is so perfectly normal to want a child in that stage of the relationship and they surpassed it by adopting Colman and starting a family. The relationship between Joss and Millie is “the power of love and partnership against the marginality and potentially fetishized person Joss embodies as a transgendered, transsexual male” (Hairston 692). Millie is a confusing character. She does not define herself as a lesbian even though Joss Moody is biologically female. She loves him for who he is. She is cisgender, that is, her personal identity and gender corresponds with her birth sex, but “Some cisgender people—men, women, gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual—seek sexual and romantic partnerships with people they know to be transgender. Under a heteronormative system, this open desire for transgender bodies typically is framed as pathological or fetishistic” (Schilt, Westbrook 461). Kay’s characterisation of Millie is very interesting, since the reader ultimately questions what her sexual preference is, which further shows how important it seems to categorise individuals. In this way, Kay’s novel challenges binary categorisations held by our society on yet another level. The reader is also left wondering whether Millie is withholding information about her own sexuality in fear of social judgement.

8. Colman: Race and Gender

All his life Colman has suffered from identity issues regarding his real heritage and due to being a black man growing up in a mostly white community. He never feels a sense of belonging anywhere. He is a 36-year-old introverted man that loathes jazz and hates the unconventional upbringing he was given. He goes back and forth in time and questions his past and future. He feels puzzled by who he really is. Things progressively worsen after he finds out that his father was born a female, since after that he cannot accept Joss’s masculinity and thus his fatherhood. He is extremely angry after seeing his father’s naked body. He tells himself that he is a stupid failure. He is not driven to make anything of himself in this life because it is too much pressure to be as successful as his
father and he feels conned by his dad. However, the most definite reason for his unenthusiastic outlook on life is that he is a black man in Britain. Racial discrimination is not innate in our minds. It has originated through history by economics and politics because of greed and thirst for power. This division between races has been used as a tool to control and impose fear. AnaLouise Keating writes that “Racial divisions and the concept of purity on which they rely were developed by those in power to create a hierarchy that grants all sorts of special benefits to some groups of people while simultaneously denying, oppressing, and excluding many others” (5). Colman has learned from society that he is a lost cause. He demonstrates how black people are often put under the same hat by recalling times when he got picked up by the police just for being black. He always feels judged for doing something: “It’s like we only had the one face to them. The same face. The one that was wanted for something” (Kay 162). He feels that people fear him even though they do not want to express it; he can sense it. Colman has a job as a courier on a motorbike so he wears a helmet and motorcycle gear. He likes the disguise and the feeling of not being stereotyped as a black man.

Colman does not feel a sense of belonging, he got rid of his Scottish accent once they moved to London because there he got discriminated against not only for being black but for being Scottish as well. London was “seething, racist”, he states (Kay 51). Kay uses Colman as an inspiration by her own experiences and he represents an autobiographical element in the novel. He is a focal point for issues of identity and race that are close to Kay’s heart. Similarly to Kay, Colman feels excluded: “But I didn’t feel Scottish. Didn’t feel English either. Didn’t feel anything. My heart is a fucking stone” (Kay 51). His identity issues are parallel to Kay’s expressed feelings on living as a black woman in Scotland. Colman is Scottish but does not feel Scottish so he does not find a sense of belonging in his own country. Brown argues that: “Whether Colman will succeed in identifying as a Scottish citizen will depend not only on himself, but also on how his being in Scotland will be viewed and culturally negotiated” (226). He has little connection with Scotland and none with his possible African roots. He does not understand how his Scottish black friends feel a connection with Africa when they have not even been there. Colman tells the reader about the first time that he felt racism directed against himself and others like him. He was six years old and witnessed a white man calling a black man an ape. Colman has identity issues because he does not know
his heritage, he does not even know which one of his biological parents was black (Kay 58). Therefore, he is understandably annoyed when he gets asked where he is from because he does not know that himself: “Morocco, Trinidad, Tobago, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Jamaica […] What does that matter anyway?” (Kay 58). It is rare that a white person is asked their heritage so the question remains why they should feel the need to ask him when the fact of the matter is, he is Scottish. These presumptions, not being considered English or Scottish, are an example of racial discrimination.

As mentioned above, Colman feels conned and angry that he did not know his father was biologically female and finds it hard to accept and understand Joss following his father’s death. Colman thinks he is a failure, he feels stupid that he did not realize his father’s gender and blames himself, thinking: “That boy must have been thick. Two planks. Colman Moody the guy who didn’t do nothing” (Kay 46). Colman is also very hurt that his father could not just tell him: “But why couldn’t he tell his own son? Sometime or fucking other. I’m over thirty. I’m not some adolescent or some ‘wee boy’” (Kay 55). He worshipped his father when growing up. His expectations of what Joss Moody’s son should be like are so high that he does not see the point in trying because he thinks so little of himself. He wants answers to why Joss transitioned from female to male and questions whether he did it just to be able to succeed in jazz: “If the jazz world was so ‘anything goes’ like my father claimed, then why didn’t he come clean and spit it out, man? […] Why not a woman playing a fucking trumpet, man what is wrong with that?” (Kay 57). The answer to this is that there is nothing wrong with a woman playing a trumpet, but Colman has just not realised yet that in his father’s mind and heart he never was a woman. The lack of knowledge about transgender people, exemplified here in Colman’s reaction, gives rise to a mixture of false accusations about people like Joss. What needs to be done to reinforce an understanding about transgender people and other minority groups is providing education and encouraging compassion and an open mind towards them in order to unlearn prejudices and binary thinking.

Colman has issues with Joss’s view on their racial heritage. He has an incessant need to know his own and his father’s heritage and is bothered that his father did not tell him; Joss told him that it does not matter because Joss’s heritage would not change the fact that he is his father and Colman is his son (Kay 59). Joss knows through his own struggles that biology has the least to do with how we identify and tries to relay this
very important fact to his son. Joss tried to console his young son when Colman was searching for answers, by telling him to make his own bloodline and heritage, but this did not sit right with Colman. Joss said, “Know who you are and it doesn’t matter where your mother or father was from” (Kay 192). Colman however cannot receive this important life lesson from his father because he is stuck in the binary categorization society has instilled in him. Colman is lost and cannot find his own identity because he is looking for it within normative ideas of what an identity is and what we can identify with. Colman is not ready to open his eyes to the possibility that his identity is not prescribed by society and that he has to find it within himself. Perhaps Joss saw this limitation in his son and did not want to confuse him even further by disclosing his biological gender, but on the other hand, letting Colman into the secret might have helped him break out of his normative way of thinking and categorizing. Colman says that he is doing his father’s biography book for the money, but he does not realize that he is grieving the man that was his father and that what he is really doing is trying to get closer to him and getting to know him again after learning about this huge secret in his life that he was never let in on. The fact that he was the only one in the family who did not know this huge thing touches a sore spot as it is yet another thing that makes him feel that he never really belonged and that he was never Joss and Millie’s “real” son.

Also, Colman is perhaps trying to discover his own and his father’s heritage and thereby his own identity.

Colman feels that he is the only one that had a father like his: “I could ring around the whole country and never find anybody that’s gone through what I’m going through. I bet you” (Kay 61). He feels alone, like his father has made him unreal and that his life was a lie. After seeing Joss’s naked body the first thing that comes to Colman’s head is “freak”. Due to lack of information about transgender people Joss is associated with abnormality by his own son, a person who should have loved him for who he was and seen clearer than everyone else who Joss really was. However, like everybody else, Colman wrongly associates his father with lesbianism. He has nothing against lesbians but the fact that his father was a lesbian (as Colman understands it) destroys him. Colman is full of wrong ideas about what it means to be transgender and is thus very angry with his father. What he has learned from binary social norms has shaped his thinking and given rise to various misconceptions.
9. The Importance of Education: The Power of Trumpet

Jackie Kay’s novel Trumpet shows how information on unconventional identities is essential in order to stop ignorance and bring equality and understanding to society and people’s mind-sets. Categorizing other individuals through binary values is prominent in our time and place. This stems largely from social politics. Prejudgment concerning identity is effectively articulated in this quote written by Keating:

> Whether we identify as “of color” or “white” as “female” or “male” or “trans,” as “lesbian” or “straight” or “bisexual” or “queer,” we have all been trained to evaluate ourselves and each other according to the existing labels. We have been indoctrinated into a dualistic worldview and an overreliance on empirical-rational thought, which creates a restrictive framework. This framework marks, divides, and segregates based on narrow, binary-oppositional models of difference. (Keating 3)

This articulation is essential to be able to understand how prejudgment is cultivated. There needs to be a change in these matters and there needs to be clear education concerning the history and culture of minority and diverse social groups to bring more social justice to the world.

Jackie Kay’s writing is very valuable, both for readers that experience prejudice concerning their identity, whether it is based on gender, race or sexual orientation, and for readers to become better aware of other identities than their own and the problematic nature of identity crisis (Walker 36). Social identity categorizing is very visible, but it is important not to isolate those who are “different” from the “normal” individuals. There needs to be social justice, flexibility, education about and between all identity categories. Without this we trap ourselves in a box with tight worldviews and little understanding for anything considered diverse. There needs to be a social goal amongst everybody to stop discrimination and aim for liberation and justice for all identities, whether concerning gender, sexuality, race or religion. Ignorance needs to be replaced with compassion and self-reflection. Let us look at this powerful quote written by Andrea Canaan from the book This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color:
The enemy is brownness and whiteness, maleness and femaleness. The enemy is our urgent need to stereotype and close off people, places, and events into isolated categories. Hatred, distrust, irresponsibility, unloving, classism, sexism, and racism, in their myriad forms, cloud our vision and isolate us. This closed and limited view blocks women embracing women, brown women embracing brown women, brown women embracing brown men, brown women embracing white women and women embracing men. We close off avenues of communication and vision so that individual and communal trust, responsibility, loving, and knowing are impossible. (Canaan 236)

If there were better knowledge and education about oppressed groups, like transgender people and black British people, the characters of Trumpet might not have these binary views and wrong opinions of Joss’s transgender identity. Hopefully Millie would have been met with understanding and sympathy at her husband’s death. Colman would not have felt racially discriminated and he would not have been so confused about his father’s identity. Joss might have had the courage to publicly admit his transition and gone to the hospital to treat his ulcer without fear of being met with prejudice. Teaching non-binary race, gender and sexuality concepts is important in order to stretch society’s thinking and broaden citizens’ views, to minimise prejudice against race and gender and other minority groups, and it could surely save the lives of those that are excluded from society. A transgender person should not have to fear transitioning and a black person should not have the feeling he or she is feared because of the colour of their skin. There needs to be a realization that in the end we are all human. If there were better knowledge and education about socially oppressed minority groups, and if social diversity were celebrated rather than discriminated against, then people who fall outside the rooted norms of society would not have to fight for the right to be themselves and could live their lives happily out in the open.
10. Conclusion

Even though we have come a long way in understanding and supporting communities in their fight for equality, binary values and discrimination against individuals with unusual identities and minority groups still prevail. The need to categorize people and ask the question: “What are you?” is still in society’s mind-set. Jackie Kay, a mixed race, lesbian, Scottish novelist, poet and playwright uses her work to give insight into how social binary views and prejudice exist in modern society. Her works have a recurrent theme of a search for identity and belonging as well as showing the cultivation of racism and other social binary views. In her novel Trumpet she uses multiple strand narration to showcase the prejudice surrounding individuals that do not fit the social norm. Education and understanding about oppressed minority groups is essential in order to give them empowerment, promote social justice and provide a change against prejudice. Trumpet can be used as a powerful educational tool to change people’s mind-sets and go against the grain of strong binary categorisation upheld by society, as it covers the social marginality of individuals belonging to unusual groups concerning their race, gender and sexuality. Jackie Kay uses her own life experiences living as a black, lesbian woman in Scotland as a platform for her writing and she shows that discrimination based on race, gender or sexuality should not be something to opt for, rather a thing to unlearn. The novel shows the undeniable pressure to fit within social norms and how the need to define a person by their sex is crucial for acceptance and through her narrative Kay demonstrates how this is orthodox but at the same time so mindless. With her novel Kay champions diversity and gives us insight into how racism is still cultivated in modern times, how sexuality is flexible and fluid, and that gender is a feeling of the mind and heart and often completely unrelated to our biological sex. Trumpet emphasises that identity in all its forms is fluid and that there is no single truth when it comes to individuals living in a society.
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