



Sissy: a Coming-of-Gender Story by Jacob Tobia

Comstock Township Library, Friday 12/20/24 @ 4pm

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you finish reading the book?
2. What aspects of Jacob's childhood struck an emotional chord with you?
3. When discussing being feminine but existing in a masculine body, Jacob says: "My body provided protection and a stable identity, despite the fact that I was so obviously feminine..." (pg. 69) On the same page, Jacob speaks on being gender nonconforming, saying, "Being gender nonconforming and existing in public is hard for everyone. But it is especially tricky for male-bodied people whose bodies are very, well, *male*." (pg. 69) What did you think about these juxtaposed experiences?
4. What did you think about the scene where Jacob gets to participate in the pageant? (76-82) How does this event compare to the story of their grandfather participating in beauty pageants for the local Lions Club? (pg. 76)
5. On page 88, Jacob states: "In my experience, the process of being masculinized, the process of becoming a man, was based in three practices: the practice of violence, the endurance of physical pain, and the violation of consent." What was your reaction to this statement? Do you think this is an American issue or a global one?
6. What did you think of the snail analogy on page 102?
7. Jacob writes about how everyone has a coming-of-gender story, regardless of their own gender identity. How has this memoir made you consider and think of your own sense of gender?
8. What impact did the humor have on you when you read the book? How do you think the blend of humor and seriousness contributes to the book's political and social goals?
9. As Jacob discusses, Sissy was born out of their need to heal their "gender-based trauma" and argues that we are all victims of this in some capacity. How do you relate to this, and what actions can we take toward preventing and healing gender-based trauma in a collective sense?
10. When challenging the binary "Gender training" event in college, Jacob speaks on the gender divide they personally experienced, saying: "I gave up everything in order to fit in. In some way or another, we *all*

do. I gave up my hobbies, my friends, my language, the way I held my wrists. I gave it all up.” (pg 280)
How have you experienced gendered assumptions or expectations? How have gender stereotypes and policing impacted your life?

11. What was your biggest take away from reading Sissy?
12. Jacob’s experience in the mountains (pg 178-184) – what was your reaction to that story?
13. What did you think of the juxtaposition between the themes of Christianity and Queerness in the The Lesbiana’s Guide to Catholic School and in this one? (pg. 58 example) What about the differences between the fictionalized mother in The Lesbiana’s Guide to Catholic School and Jacob’s mother?
14. Throughout the book, Jacob struggles with authenticity. The ability to be their true self, times they felt challenged to fit in or be palatable, times they pushed back at expectations. Do you think even if they had been allowed to be themselves at birth, they would still struggle throughout their life with authenticity? In what ways has being authentic hindered them or helped them?
15. What were your major takeaways from the book?



If you’re interested, there’s more online about the author and the book:

To Watch:

- ★ **Good Morning America:** We went vintage shopping with gender non-conforming writer Jacob Tobia | GMA Digital (4 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6YGNgWMMY4>
- ★ **The Daily Show:** Jacob Tobia - Promoting a “Gender-Chill” Exploration of Identity with “Sissy” (7 min) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qo3rCzl_IB4
- ★ **Politics and Prose:** Conversation with Jacob Tobia, author of "Sissy" (64 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO8asn3ioFA>

To Read:

- ★ **Bookforum talks with Jacob Tobia** (Interview): <https://www.bookforum.com/interviews/bookforum-talks-with-jacob-tobia-23524>
- ★ **Hello Giggles:** Jacob Tobia Interview, "Sissy will make you kick the construct of gender to the curb with six-inch stilettos" <https://hellogiggles.com/sissy-jacob-tobia-interview/>

To Listen:

- ★ **Tilted: A Lean In Podcast:** "Gender beyond the binary" with Joey Soloway & Jacob Tobia (65 min) <https://leanin.org/tilted-podcast-season-2/gender-beyond-the-binary#>